THE TRANSITION INTO WOMANHOOD: A FEMINIST, SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST ANALYSIS

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STATEMENT

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work, and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it to any university for a degree.

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SUMMARY

The present study aimed to address the research question of how young women themselves experience the transition into womanhood, by looking at the articulated subjective experiences of young women involved in negotiating the process of 'becoming a woman'. The research question was approached from a post-modern feminist and social constructionist perspective, using qualitative methodology. In-depth interviews were conducted with two groups of young women - five white, middle class students who are involved in the Women's Mental Health Research Project (WMHRP) as interviewers, and five coloured, working-class young women who would be interviewees in the WMHRP. These two groups of participants were recruited from different social backgrounds in order to investigate contextual variations in their identity negotiation processes. Transcripts of the interviews were analyzed according to constructivist grounded theory protocol (Charmaz, 2003; Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003). Three main categories were constructed from the data, namely 1) the girl/woman dichotomy, 2) the "woman imperative", and 3) different processes experienced.

In chapter one, an introduction is provided which discusses the importance of the research question to feminist and developmental psychologists, and highlights the paucity of research on the topic within these areas. Chapter two examines the empirical literature surrounding the research question, which highlights the marginalization of the transition into womanhood by psychological researchers. Anthropological studies of 'rites of passage' are also briefly discussed. In chapter three the theoretical framework that informed the present study is discussed, namely 1) social constructionism, with its focus on discourse and its rejection of essentialism, and 2) feminism, with its emphasis on gendered identity, difference and power. Concepts central to the present study, namely development, gender, and identity are also discussed in this chapter. Chapter four provides an explanation of the methodology and methods that were used in the present study, while chapter five presents the results and a discussion of the results. Finally, chapter six consists of a discussion of the conclusions that can be drawn from the findings, as well as their implications for research and practice.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie spreek die vraag aan van hoe jong vroue self die oorgang na vrou-wees ervaar. Dit word ondersoek aan die hand van die subjektiewe belewenisse van jong vroue midde-in die proses van vrou-word, soos deur hulself geartikuleer. Die navorsingsvraagstuk is benader vanuit 'n post-moderne feministiese en sosiaal-konstruktiewe perspektief, deur gebruik van kwalitatiewe metodologie. In-diepte onderhoude is met twee groepe jong vroue gevoer – vyf hoofsaaklik blanke studente uit die middelstand wat betrokke is by die "Women's Mental Health Research Project" (WMHRP) as onderhoudvoerders, en vyf kleurling jong vroue uit die werksklas, met wie die onderhoude gevoer is. Hierdie twee groepe deelnemers is uit verskillende sosiale agtergronde gekies ten einde kontekstuele variasies in hulle identiteitsvormingsprosesse te kan ondersoek. Transkripsies van die onderhoude is ontleed aan die hand van konstruksievisties-gefundeerde teorie protokol (Charmaz, 2003; Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003). Drie hoof-kategorieë is uit die data gekonstrueer, naamlik die meisie/vrou dikotomie, die verskillende prosesse beleef, en die "vrou imperatief".

In hoofstuk een, wat die onderwerp inlei, word die belangrikheid van navorsing vir feministiese en ontwikkelingsielkundiges bespreek, en word die skaarste aan navorsing oor die onderwerp uitgelig. Hoofstuk twee bied 'n bespreking van die empiriese literatuur rondom die navorsingsvraagstuk, wat die marginalisasie van die oorgang tot vrou-wees onder navorsers in die sielkunde onderstreep. Antropologiese studies oor inisiasie-rituele word ook vlugtig bespreek. In hoofstuk drie word die teoretiese raamwerk wat die studie inlig bespreek, naamlik 1) sosiaal-konstruksionisme, met fokus op diskoers en die verwerping van essensialisme, en 2) feminisme, met klem op geslagsidentiteit, differensiasie en mag. Konsepte sentraal tot hierdie studie, naamlik ontwikkeling, geslag en identiteit word ook in hierdie hoofstuk bespreek. Hoofstuk vier bied 'n verduideliking van die metodologie en metodes wat in hierdie studie aangewend is, terwyl in hoofstuk vyf die navorsingsresultate en 'n bespreking daarvan, aangebied word. Hoofstuk ses as slothoofstuk bestaan uit 'n bespreking van die gevolgtrekkings waartoe aan die hand van die navorsingsbevindinge geraak kan word, sowel as die implikasies daarvan vir navorsing en die praktyk.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

What makes girls "girls" and not women? How do we define the symbolic boundary between womanhood and girlhood? (Sato, 1998, p. 16)

In the words of Simone de Beauvoir, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (1972, p. 295). Although this tenet has become axiomatic among gender theorists, it raises questions that have not been adequately addressed in psychology and in other fields interested in the study of gender. How do girls become women? How does the transition from girl to woman occur?

These questions are important because they are asked against a backdrop in which academic inquiry, popular culture, public policy, and the private sector have become interested in young women in unprecedented ways (Harris, 2004). At the turn of the 21st century, young women occupy a social position unique to those traditionally held by their gender. Social transformations such as feminism and post-industrialization have drastically affected the lives of young women, giving birth to an era in which varied modes of femininity are available to young women (Budgeon, 2003). This is in sharp distinction to the more limited role and identity choices that were available to women even a few decades ago. Moreover, Anita Harris (2004) cogently argues that young women have come to take on a special role in the production of the late-modern social order, in that young women have been cultivated as "the new success story for our times" (p. 9) and "have become a focus for the construction of an ideal late modern subject who is self-making, resilient, and flexible" (p. 6). As such, in Western cultures young womanhood has in recent decades come to represent the paragon of the late-modern subject (Harris, 2004).

Paradoxically however, at the same time that young women are portrayed as being increasingly confident and powerful, fears are being voiced in the public and in academia as to young women's low self-esteem and high-risk behaviours (Harris, 2004). Indeed, the literature has long shown that during adolescence and early adulthood, the period usually understood to encompass the transition into womanhood, young women face numerous mental health risks, including a decrease in self-esteem and self-confidence, and an increase in depression, eating disorders, addiction, and suicide (Abrams, 2003; Gilligan & Brown, 1992). Within much of feminist literature, adolescence is seen as a stage that is particularly difficult for

females, given the patriarchal context within which girls grow up, and is often portrayed as "a tragedy for girls" (Llewelyn & Osborne, 1990, p. 26). Consider, for example, Mary Pipher's (1994) description of female adolescence:

> Something drastic happens to girls in early adolescence. Just as planes and ships disappear mysteriously into the Bermuda Triangle, so too do the selves of girls go down in droves. They crash and burn in a social and developmental Bermuda Triangle ... They lose their assertive, energetic and "tomboyish" personalities and become deferential, self-critical and depressed. They report great unhappiness with their own bodies. (p. 19)

As such, two opposing depictions of female adolescents and young women coexist in modern-day Western society. On the one hand, young women today are actively constructed as the vanguards of an era of 'girl power', a time when young women are seen as having limitless choices and opportunities available to them. On the other hand, given the high rates of psychological problems associated with female adolescence, it is also represented as a perilous time that must be carefully navigated to ensure a successful transition into womanhood (Harris, 2004).

This depiction of present-day young women as either successful or at risk is also evident in the South African context. The increased identity choices available to young women in the West are echoed particularly saliently in the post-Apartheid context, where the contrast between previous and current constraints on the identities and subjectivities available to women can be particularly stark. However, young South African women of this age also face the serious risks of violence, poverty, unwanted pregnancy, and HIV infection (De Villiers, 2001). How young South African females negotiate the transition into womanhood within this period of dual change – the move to late modernity on a global front, and the move to a new social, economic and political order in South Africa itself - has not been directly addressed as yet.

Although many theories have been postulated about the female developmental process (for example, Erikson, 1968; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976), there is a distinct paucity in empirical work on female development in general. More specifically, on both an empirical and a theoretical level very little work has been done on the transition into womanhood. While psychology and other social sciences have traditionally focused on the process of becoming boys and girls (for example, through

sex-role socialization, gender identity, and so forth), how individuals become men and women is not fully understood. Only anthropology has studied the transition into manhood and womanhood more closely, specifically by examining the rites of passage that usher individuals through this transition in various cultures (for example, La Fontaine, 1985; Mead, 1973). Moreover, in psychology, most studies that have been conducted on this transitional period have been done using a modernist framework, and were also mainly undertaken in developed countries.

The lack of studies investigating the transition into womanhood paradoxically occurs within a context of many academics referring to 'becoming a woman' in their work (for example, Giovacchini, 1979; Massyn, 1990; Oinas, 2001). Importantly however, the process of 'becoming a woman' is merely used as a synonym for female adolescence or menarche and the transition into womanhood *per se* is usually left unexplored. As such, due to the dearth of research, the process of 'becoming a woman' has not been explained convincingly in the literature, and many gaps exist in our understanding of this transition. As Ruthellen Josselson (1990) notes: "[i]n our understanding of women's development we have lacked perspective on the different pathways to development as a woman, the different roads the girl may take to womanhood" (p. 5).

The transition into womanhood thus deserves investigation for several reasons. Firstly and most basically, it needs to be determined whether this is an important transition in the psychological lives of present-day young women. Secondly, young womanhood is a time in the female lifespan associated with adverse psychological outcomes, and, as such, warrants increased psychological focus and understanding. Better understanding the psychological worlds of young women during this potentially vulnerable period could contribute to effective prevention and intervention strategies. Thirdly, young women today are among the first generations to emerge into womanhood in the late-modern and post-women's movement era, and as such are undergoing the transition in a historically unique setting. Studying this process may thus not only provide insight into young womanhood, but also into the broader societal context of our times. Fourthly, other fields, particularly cultural studies, have become increasingly interested in, and involved in, the study of girlhood and young womanhood in recent years (see, for example, Driscoll, 2002; Harris, 2004; Inness, 1998) and psychology is in a position to contribute significantly to this upsurge of interest. Fifthly, given feminism's interest in the notion of 'woman', the transition into womanhood is particularly salient for feminist theory and has surprisingly been

ignored to date – as Driscoll (2002) notes, "as a future-directed politics, as a politics of transformation, girls and the widest range of representations of, discourses on, and sites of becoming a woman are crucial to feminism" (p. 9). Understanding how girls enter womanhood in different contexts may meaningfully contribute to academic feminism's interest in issues of difference, subjectivity, and identity, issues which are currently being grappled with in a post-modern climate characterized by beliefs in fluidity, diversity and fragmentation. Lastly, research on this transition assists in countering the historical marginalization of female development in psychology and gives voice to a group of individuals who would normally go unheard.

In addition, only a limited number of studies have compared young women's development across socio-economic class, cultural, or racial lines (Abrams, 2003). For example, low-income women have traditionally been marginalized by researchers - as Reid (1993) asserts, "in psychological research, poor women have been shut out and also shut up, that is, effectively silenced" (p. 133). Young women are embedded in specific social relations, knowledges, practices, and technologies that create the historical and cultural contexts within which they live their lives (Budgeon, 2003). It is increasingly being recognized that a major goal of gender research should be to provide a meaningful analysis of gender as it is experienced in many different contexts - "we can no longer pretend that we can ignore context and still understand gender" (Reid, 1993, p. 147).

Issues surrounding the transition into womanhood may be particularly salient in South Africa, where females of this age-group are usually only studied when they are confronted with a "problem" such as pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, or prostitution. As such, there remains a basic need to describe and then to understand how young South African women are thinking about themselves and how identities are constructed in this group. The present study specifically looks at whether the transition into womanhood functions as an important psychological issue for present-day young South African women. Developing a better understanding of what young women in the general population are grappling with at this stage in their lives may lead to insight as to how to best address their problems. Moreover, given the disparate contexts within which different groups of South African girls grow up, it is important to understand the ways in which intersections of class, culture, and race come to produce conditions of opportunity or threat which influence how their identities as women come to be forged. As such, the two groups of participants in the present study came from two very different substrates of South African society, in

that their backgrounds were distinguished by socio-economic class, race, language and culture.

In the present study, two groups of young women in their late teens and early twenties were asked to talk about how they subjectively experienced the transition into womanhood. The study aimed to examine how young female South Africans negotiate their identities as 'women' and how they subjectively understand the transition into womanhood to occur. It was considered important to examine participants' articulated subjective experiences in order to craft an analysis rooted in the actual lived experiences of young women undergoing this transition. Data on subjective experiences were assumed to provide the most richly detailed, vivid and contextualized accounts of what this period entails for young women.

The present study aimed to help address the paucity of knowledge regarding the transition into womanhood. At the most basic level, it aimed to examine whether the transition into womanhood can be considered an important transition in the first place. As such, the present study was exploratory, in that it investigated whether young women themselves draw a distinction between girlhood and womanhood, whether this is an important distinction to them, and how they subjectively experience the transition into womanhood. It is on the one hand descriptive, in that it aimed to document how the participants understood the notions of 'girl' and 'woman' and the transition between the two, and, on the other hand, is also analytical in that it sought to begin to develop theoretical ideas about how this transition works and how it may be shaped by contextual forces. A qualitative approach was used which not only allowed young women to give voice to their own subjective experiences and understandings of 'becoming a woman', but which also allowed for an examination of how these subjective experiences and understandings are embedded within larger social contexts. Looking at participants from different social backgrounds allowed for insight into how the participants' identities as girls or women might be differently constructed in different social contexts. In addition, a post-modern, social constructionist perspective allowed the pathways and processes of young women's gender identity negotiations to be understood against a backdrop of intricate social contexts and conditions.

This thesis will start with a chapter discussing the basic theoretical framework that informed the study and the central concepts used throughout this thesis. Chapter three will examine the empirical literature surrounding the research question,

including a brief discussion of anthropological studies of 'rites of passage'. Chapter four will provide an explanation of the methodology and methods that were used in the present study, while chapter five will present the results and a discussion of the results. Finally, chapter six will consist of a discussion of the conclusions that can be drawn from the findings, as well as their implications for research, theory and practice.

2. THE EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the empirical literature surrounding the transition into womanhood. Although several theories have been postulated about the female developmental process in recent decades (for example, Erikson, 1968; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976) there is a distinct paucity in empirical work on the topic (theoretical formulations regarding the question of interest will be discussed in chapter three). Only studies specifically related to the transition into womanhood will be discussed, given that much of the work related to 'becoming a woman' merely uses this term as a synonym for another phenomenon of interest, such as menarche, and thus does not contribute directly to our understanding of how the transition into womanhood itself is experienced by young women. Psychological studies will be considered first, followed by a discussion of anthropological studies related to the transition into womanhood.

2.2 Psychology

Research on the transition from girlhood to womanhood is scarce in the field of psychology. After a comprehensive review of the psychological literature, only a handful of empirical studies concerning the transition into womanhood were found. This was surprising given the wide currency with which the term 'becoming a woman' is used in the literature. However, in most cases the notion of 'becoming a woman' is only used as a metaphor for other events such as menarche (for example, Kissling, 2002; Massyn, 1990), losing one's virginity (for example, Carpenter, 2002), or refers loosely to the entire period of female adolescence. Giovacchini (1979), for instance, in a work entitled "The Dilemma of Becoming a Woman", discusses only work on loss of virginity amongst females, while Oinas (2001), in a study aimed to address the question of "what does it mean to become a woman?" (p. 1) states that "the solution" to this question is to focus on "the moment when a young girl first finds a red stain in her underpants" (p. 1). The process of the transition into womanhood *per se* is thus usually not the question of interest.

Only five empirical studies were found that in some way looked at the transition into womanhood specifically (not as a metaphor for menarche and so forth). Evidence for the salience of this transitional period in women's lives can be found in the results of a landmark study on female development carried out by Mercer, Nichols and Doyle

(1989). In research similar to that done on males by Daniel Levinson (1979), Mercer et al. were amongst the first to look at the different transitions in a woman's life and at women's major life events in developmental context. The research involved determining the developmental transitions that women themselves felt they go through during life. Transitions were defined as turning points, a point of reference from which a person's life course takes a new direction requiring adaptation or change.

Based on data from interviews, the researchers classified the major transitional periods in a woman's life, as identified by the women themselves, as follows:

- 16 through 25 years: Launching into adulthood/Breaking Away
  - 16 through 20 years: Early Launching/ Breaking Away
  - 21 through 25 years: Later Launching/Breaking Away
- 26 through 30 years: Levelling/Young versus Old
- 36 through 40 years: Liberating/ Attachment versus Separateness
- 61 through 65 years: Regeneration/Redirection
- 76 through 80 years: Creativity versus Destructiveness Period

Significant for the present study, the single most important transitional period identified by Mercer et al.'s participants occurred during late adolescence and early adulthood (the age period that the present study focuses on). The middle to late teenage years (16-20) and early adult years (21-25) represented the greatest activity in developmental transitions over the entire life course for women: 81% and 83% of the participants reported having experienced transitions during these ages, respectively. There were no changes in the number or quality of transitional events occurring during the age span of 16 through 25, leading the researchers to suggest that this was one period as a unit rather than the two arbitrarily assigned age groupings. Mercer et al. concluded that the launching into adulthood stage was the period of greatest transitional activity during the entire life course for women and that the launching into adulthood period is a significant and decisive time in female development.

Four smaller-scale studies were identified that pertained to the question of interest. Firstly, Williams (2002), in a study on "trying on gender, gender regimes and the process of becoming a woman" (p. 29) found that girls "try on" gender by tentatively experimenting with different femininities as they progress through adolescence. The "trying on" process generally demonstrates the uncertainty with which teenage girls

approached womanhood. Participants consisted of two groups of 13-year-old girls who came from two different socio-economic and geographic backgrounds, which influenced how they negotiated the transition into womanhood. Context played an important role in how this "critical transition from girl to woman" (p. 31) proceeded. However, unlike the present study, Williams did not focus directly on what the participants themselves believed the transition into womanhood entailed and looked at a much younger age group.

Secondly, a discourse analysis by Johnson (1993) highlighted the importance of social norms and expectations on the subjective experience of 'growing up'. In an attempt to answer the question of "what does it mean for women to grow up", Johnson investigated the social definitions of girlhood and growing up in 1950s and 1960s Australia. Looking specifically at the discourses surrounding 'growing up' at that time, she highlighted the normative definitions of growing up that shaped the experiences of young Australian women in the mid-20th century and examined how these discourses shaped the identity of females from that generation. Johnson found that the mass media and the practices of educational, legal and welfare institutions delineated a series of developmental tasks involved in 'proper' growing up, through which the individual would acquire a stable and coherent identity – as Johnson put it, "growing up entailed making a self" (p. 150).

Thirdly, a study by Aronson (1999) examined the meaning of becoming an adult woman today. She found that young women's experiences of the transition into womanhood reflected recent historical trends, such as the extension of adolescence, the increasingly individualized life course, and the post- women's movement era. At the same time, her study highlighted the divergent trajectories and developmental experiences of women from different racial and class backgrounds, showing how the transition into adulthood is influenced by gender, racial, and class inequalities.

Lastly, Abrams (2003) recently investigated the contextual variations in young women's identity negotiations. Two groups of teenage girls from very different social backgrounds were used to investigate how girls experience their gendered selves, seek personal power, and resist gender-based stereotypes. Results showed differences in the stereotypes encountered in their communities. Again though, participants were young adolescent females. Like much of the theoretical literature on the subject of 'becoming a woman', these studies mainly focused on females in early adolescence.

2.3 Anthropology

Anthropology has been involved in understanding transitions during the life course, specifically by studying the "rites of passage" that comprise the crossing of boundaries and changes in social status that come with development (Rasing, 1995). While many societies have rituals to mark the passing of a stage in the life of an individual (Rasing, 1995), in contemporary North American and European societies such formal rituals have become the exception rather than the rule (Wolf, 1998). Anthropological research has shown, however, that this is not the case with all cultures.

The rite of passage or "initiation rite" marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. Such maturity rituals are innately concerned with affirming adult status, particularly in terms of the opposed categories of gender – all maturity rituals proclaim a fundamental distinction between the male and the female (La Fontaine, 1985). Compared to boys, the rites of passage for girls are usually small-scale and individual in nature and are associated with the physical events of menstruation, loss of virginity, and childbirth. The reproductive life cycle is most often the dominant element in female rites of passage (La Fontaine, 1985).

More generally, anthropologists argue that there are three phases in the rite of passage: the phase of separation, the marginal phase, and the phase of aggregation (Rasing, 1995). This three-part process dramatizes the transition to adulthood by creating a boundary between the child and adult state, transforming the individual as they cross from one to the other (Rasing, 1995). The first phase, that of separation, comprises the symbolic detachment of the individual from an earlier phase in the social community or structure. During the intervening period, the marginal phase (also known as the liminal phase), the characteristics of the individual are ambiguous – he/she passes through a cultural realm that has none of the attributes of the past or the coming state. In the third phase, the aggregation, the passage to adulthood is consummated. The individual is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has clear rights and responsibilities within their social setting (Rasing, 1995).

While the specific criteria of the entrance into womanhood differ according to culture, certain commonalities of girls' initiation rites in tribal societies are evident. Rites of passage are often based on menarche, when the girl is taken out of her usual surroundings, is isolated in a far away place (for the Swahili, the forest, a sacred

cabin in North American Indian tribes) for a specified period of time ranging from days to years (Wolf, 1998). During this time the individual may observe taboos and wear a special costume as well as learn ritual songs and dances, and feminine skills (Wolf, 1998). Often the passage from girlhood to womanhood is a time of celebration - in coastal tribes of Northern Australia at the turn of the 20th century, for example, a girl's passage into womanhood was celebrated with collective dancing and gift giving. Marks of a girl's new womanhood included the tattooing of her body or the blackening of her teeth (Wolf, 1998).

It is thus clear that in many cultures the transition into womanhood is a significant event that involves a specific rite of passage. However, in much of the present-day world there are few, if any, universally celebrated rites of passage that mark the beginning and completion of the journey into womanhood (Rishoi, 2003). Wolf (1998) has argued for the value of such clear rites of passage, noting that "our culture does not help 'make women' very well" (p. 143) precisely because of the lack of clear rites of passage to usher girls into womanhood. Riser (1999) similarly notes that a recent increase in violence, drug abuse, and suicide among adolescents and young adults is attributed by some observers to the decrease in formal rites of passage in present-day developed countries.

2.4 Conclusion

In summary, a literature search of psychological and anthropological research found few empirical studies that specifically looked at how the transition into womanhood is subjectively experienced. Mercer, Nichols and Doyle (1989) found that when asked about the most significant transitional periods in their lives, the vast majority of participants identified the late teen and early adulthood years as being the most significant. The four other psychological studies discussed clearly suggest that social context plays an important role in the processes of 'becoming a woman', 'growing up' and forging a gendered identity. In addition, anthropological studies show that although formal rites of passage have largely disappeared in the West, in many cultures the transition from childhood to adulthood is clearly demarcated according to gendered initiation rites.

It is thus clear that, with the exception of anthropological formulations, the psychological literature lacks empirical understanding of young women's subjective experiences and understandings of 'becoming a woman'. It can be argued that such studies would provide insight not only into young women's experiences of this

transitional period, but also more generally into their gendered identity negotiations and psychological worlds at this age. On the one hand, the paucity of research may clearly simply reflect the fact that this is not an important transition for young women. However, no research was found supporting this assumption and the study by Mercer, Nichols and Doyle (1989) in fact suggested that this age period may indeed by the most significant one in the female life span. As such, one of the aims of the present study was to explore whether or not the transition into womanhood can be considered a salient developmental event for women. On the other hand, the dearth of literature may be reflective of the pervasive marginalization of female development within the psychological research and the general lack of analysis of taken-for-granted processes within traditional, modernist perspectives.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

As all research decisions have both theoretical grounds and theoretical consequences (Mason, 2002), the purpose of this chapter is to highlight the theoretical and ontological assumptions that informed this study, namely those of social constructionism and feminism. The chapter will also discuss the major constructs that were used in the present study. More specifically, the implications of a social constructionist and feminist framework for the understanding of these concepts will be explained. Firstly, post-modernism and post-structuralism will be discussed as the intellectual traditions which gave rise to social constructionism, followed by an explanation of the key tenets of social constructionism and social constructionism's place in psychology. Secondly, different definitions of feminism will be considered, with particular focus on post-modern and post-structuralist feminism. Lastly, the central concepts of this thesis will be discussed, namely development, identity and gender.

3.2 Social constructionism

3.2.1 *The intellectual tradition: post-modernism and post-structuralism*

The notion of social constructionism is best understood against the theoretical backdrop in which it took root. Post-modernism and post-structuralism both offer accounts of human beings' place in the world that compete with conventional explanations (Belsey, 2002). Post-modernism, which began roughly in the early 1970s, is defined in various ways, but is most often used to describe an era wherein the 'grand narratives' inherited from the Enlightenment, such as beliefs in Reason, Knowledge, Power, and the Self, have been superseded by notions of instability, fragmentation, diversity, and indeterminacy (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). Post-modernists seek to create scepticism about these grand narratives - beliefs in overarching, immutable constructs that are often taken for granted within, and serve as legitimation of, contemporary Western culture (Flax, 1990). They also challenge the central claim of modernism that a single, coherent, and real world lies 'out there' waiting to be discovered, and argue that there are multiple alternative realities, each made 'real' through human meaning-making (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001). Interest is in the fluidity, heterogeneity, and multiplicity of the social order and attention is shifted away from universals to questions of difference (Budgeon, 2003). Rather than searching for 'the truth', post-modernists address the ways that

meanings are negotiated, the control over meanings by those in power, and how meanings are represented in language (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990).

Moreover, post-modernisms have problematized issues of self, gender, knowledge, and power, and strive to understand these constructs "without resorting to linear, teleological, holistic, or binary ways of thinking or being" (Flax, 1990, p. 15). As Lesko (2001) explains:

> Post-modernism works against the liberal humanist belief that human beings have an essential core "self" that is unique and imagined as deeply inside or internal to an individual. The human being of post-modernism is understood as a text, as a composition, as a bricolage, or as a performance without an essential core. The self becomes "subjectivity", which is the effect of material practices, of discourses, rather than a prior unity. (p. 17)

Post-modernists make connections between power, knowledge, and self (Flax, 1990). They challenge the ideology of the universal modern subject in order to develop alternative notions of subjectivity and recognize that identities are not unitary or essential, but are constituted from multiple sources and assume multiple forms (Budgeon, 2003). Post-modernists thus focus on the constructed fragility of subjectivity, with its internal fragmentation and diverse forms (Beasley, 1999).

Post-modernism is both 'constructive' and 'deconstructive'. It is constructive in that it perceives knowledge, truth, reality, and gender as constructions that are created through everyday social interaction between people. It is deconstructive in that it challenges and exposes these beliefs, which are generally accepted as natural and immutable, as social constructions (Allen & Baber, 1992). Deconstruction has shown the possibility of questioning all conventional meanings and word uses as well as demonstrating how apparently firm facts about the world are often in flux (Gergen, 2001). As Gergen (2001) explains, "the post-modern approach is to question - but not to deny - all linguistic categories and especially to resist the reification of universal, atemporal ones, including gender" (p. 10).

The terms 'post-modernism' and 'post-structuralism' are often used synonymously, but are not equivalent. Briefly, structuralism involves the identification of universal structures, usually binary oppositions, which underlie culture (Belsey, 2002). Structuralists reject the humanist belief that individuals have primary control over

their futures, maintaining instead that cultural and social life is ruled by deep-seated structural polarities (Macdonald, 1995). From a structural perspective, for example, femininity can be understood as the structural opposite of masculinity, both of which are embedded in the broader structures of patriarchy (Macdonald, 1995).

Post-structuralism, on the other hand, shifts the focus to the "quicksand of subjectivity", which is influenced by competing identities, conflicting discourses, and complex manoeuvrings of power (Macdonald, 1995, p. 37). It is thus chiefly concerned with issues of subjectivity, language, the body, and power (Weedon, 1999). Post-structuralism agrees that structuring oppositions, such as male/female and girl/woman, are basic to everyday ways of thinking and talking, but questions these familiar oppositions (Lesko, 2001). From this perspective, the subject is seen as constructed in language, "and since language is characterized by unstable, constantly deferred meanings, the subject too is constantly in process, always denied a fixed identity" (Rishoi, 2003, p. 44). Language and discourses construct different meanings for the individual, in turn allowing for different subjectivities to emerge (Rishoi, 2003). Post-structuralism also emphasizes the contextual fluidity and ongoing production of meaning, be it in language or other aspects of social and cultural life (Beasley, 1999). From this perspective, meaning is constantly being produced within particular contexts, and is thus neither random nor fixed (Beasley, 1999). As Beasley (1999, p. 91) notes, "poststructuralists tend to stress the shifting, fragmented complexity of meaning (and relatedly of power), rather than a notion of its centralized order".

3.2.2 *Defining social constructionism*

Social constructionism, rather than being a unitary movement, is composed of several different and overlapping perspectives (mainly post-modernism and post-structuralism) that have been influenced by a variety of social science disciplines (Durrheim, 1997). The notion of social constructionism is defined in various ways. However, common to all definitions of social constructionism are four key tenets: the view that knowledge is sustained by social processes; a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge; historical and cultural specificity; and the view that knowledge and social action go together (Burr, 1995).

Firstly, knowledge is believed to be sustained by social processes, which implies that our knowledge of the world is constructed between people rather than derived from the nature of the world as it 'really is'. Understandings of the world and the versions

of 'truth' and knowledge that result here from are fabricated through day-to-day interactions between people in the course of social life (Burr, 1995). Thus, knowledge is produced through social interactions and what people call knowledge is simply what they've implicitly agreed to call 'the truth' in that particular time and place (Bohan, 1993).

Secondly, social constructionism insists that we look critically at the taken-for-granted ways in which we understand the world and ourselves (Burr, 1995). What we know about the world does not simply mirror reality (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001). As such, social constructionism challenges positivism and empiricism's claims that the nature of the world can be revealed through objective observation. Social constructionists urge scepticism and suspicion of assumptions about the world. Particularly important is their belief that categories with which the world is understood (such as man/woman, girl/woman) do not necessarily refer to real divisions (Burr, 1995).

Thirdly, this perspective also holds that the ways in which we look at and make sense of the world are historically and culturally specific. It highlights the social and historical nature of human consciousness (Durrheim, 1997). Not only are all ways of understanding thus specific to particular eras and cultures, they are also seen as products of that era and culture. As a result, knowledge and 'truth' is always culturally- and historically-specific, rather than universal and eternal.

Lastly, a term closely linked with social constructionism is that of 'discourse', "the structured ways of knowing which are both produced in, and shapers of culture" (Ransom, 1993, p. 123) or what Lesko (2001, p. 8) has called "systems of reasoning". As such, to study a phenomenon from a social constructionist perspective includes examining the discourses that exist on it in a society (Willig, 2001). Numerous discourses exist about any object or event, such as womanhood and girlhood, and each depicts or 'constructs' that object or event in a different way. Because each discourse looks at the same phenomenon from a different angle, how we perceive an object or event, such as 'becoming a woman', is integrally related to which discourse we are using to understand it. Discourses vary according to cultural and historic location and are ever-changing. So-called 'dominant discourses' are those discourses about a phenomenon that are the most widely (and uncritically) accepted as taken-for-granted 'truth'.

3.2.3 *Social constructionism in psychology*

The rise of social constructionism in the social sciences can be traced to the publication in 1966 of Berger and Luckman's influential text, *The Social Construction of Reality* and to Kenneth Gergen's work hereon (for example, 1999). Within contemporary psychology, social constructionism refers to a set of approaches that is critical of the essentialism, empiricism, and positivism of mainstream, traditional psychology (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). Social constructionist psychologists hold that psychological knowledge is an historical product of social processes (Liebrucks, 2001). Instead of seeing the discipline as a science that discovers and describes real things (such as insanity, the mind, and emotions), psychological knowledge is understood as constructed within certain specific historical and political contexts (Durrheim, 1997).

The rise of social constructionism in psychology has allowed researchers and theorists to examine phenomena using a lens that is largely unique from what has traditionally been the case in psychology. Social constructionism highlights factors that are usually ignored in other approaches, specifically by bringing to light the social nature of phenomena and the influential and intricate role of social context. As a methodology it is particularly well-suited to the qualitative approach and allows for an analysis of social phenomena which is focused on meaning, context and discourse (Mason, 2002). Moreover, social constructionism has broadened research possibilities, shifting the focus from the essentialized, intra-psychic level to the production of gender in a complex matrix of intra-psychic and interpersonal conditions and circumstances (Olesen, 2000). As such, it opens up areas of interest to alternative interpretations.

It thus seemed important to explore the transition into womanhood from within a social constructionist framework because this approach takes into account the importance of context, is anti-essentialist, and allows for a new perspective on female development by bringing to light facets rendered invisible by more traditional theoretical perspectives. Its focus on fluid subjectivity, multiple identities and conflicting discourses was considered vital in obtaining a comprehensive picture of how the process of 'becoming a woman' is subjectively experienced within particular social contexts.

3.3 Feminism

3.3.1 Defining feminism

Feminism is notoriously difficult to define as it entails a variety of widely divergent approaches (Beasley, 1999). As Ramazanoğlu (2002) puts it, "for every generalization that one can make about feminism it is possible to find 'feminists' who do not fit, or who do not want to fit" (p. 5). Given this lack of uniformity, it may be more appropriate to speak of 'feminisms' rather than a monolithic 'feminism'.

The history of modern Western feminism is conventionally split into 'first-wave' and 'second-wave' feminism, which can be thought of as two different types of feminism, both of which are still active around the world today (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001). Briefly, 'first-wave' feminism, heavily influenced by the earlier historical events of the French Revolution and the abolition of slavery, began in the twentieth century and, in the West, lasted until the early 1950s (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001). It was chiefly concerned with the material conditions of women's lives and was aimed at gaining equal treatment for women in all areas of life. Issues involved women's right to vote, equal pay, and changing legislation which disadvantaged women. 'Second-wave' feminism began in the 1960s and its conception is often equated with the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). It involved a shift away from the concern with civil politics inherent in 'first-wave' feminism and its focus fell instead on interpersonal politics, as is evidenced by the phrase 'the personal is political' (Kemp & Squires, 1997). Politics of reproduction, personal relationships, and personal identity were primary on the agenda, as feminists began focusing on issues such as domestic violence, rape, and the effects of gender stereotyping.

Despite their diversity, a common goal of all feminists is to challenge institutionalized unequal power relations between men and women (Ramazanoğlu, 2002). In the political arena this involves actively challenging societal structures and conventions that maintain the status quo. Within academic circles it largely entails problematizing and analyzing the construct of gender. Feminism can thus be understood as a political and academic movement which focuses on unequal power relationships between the genders (in which women are generally subordinate to men) and which attributes these differences to social, rather than to natural factors and thus sees them as amenable to change.

3.3.2 Post-modern and post-structural feminism

Since the start of 'second-wave' feminism, feminist issues have become increasingly prominent in academia, with psychology being just one of many academic fields

which have incorporated feminism. Second-wave feminism's analytic focus initially fell almost exclusively on male dominance and on totalizing theories of patriarchy (Kemp & Squires, 1997). However, as theory and research matured, emphasis gradually shifted to issues of identity, which in turn revolve around questions of difference and power (Allen & Baber, 1992).

The notion of 'difference' has become increasingly important to present-day feminists. For example, Hekman (1999) argues that three 'difference strategies' are evident in the history of second-wave feminism. The first involved an effort to 'erase' the differences between men and women that occurred during the 1950s and 1960s, when equality and similarity between the sexes was emphasized. In contrast, by the 1980s the second strategy highlighted the differences between men and women, particularly by valorizing the feminine (Hekman, 1999). The third difference strategy, that of exploring differences *within* male and female categories, came to the fore in the 1990s and went hand in hand with the emergence of post-modern thought in feminism. Here, the traditional neat binaries stemming from the masculine/feminine dichotomy were rejected and the differences between women themselves were seen as being at least as important as the differences between women and men. Moreover, the search for a unifying cause for women's oppression (such as patriarchy) became less fashionable (Beasley, 1999).

Numerous types of feminisms exist within second-wave feminism, for example cultural feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism, and post-modern feminism, each ascribing different aetiologies and solutions to patriarchy (Bartky, 1990). While recognizing the intricate diversity that characterizes present-day feminisms, for the purposes of this study 'feminism' will refer to post-modern and post-structural feminism. Post-modern and post-structural feminism challenge dualistic categorizations that portray men and women as essentially different or similar and focus on how the categories of 'man' and 'woman' are socially constructed and for what ends (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2001). They also stress plurality by rejecting conceptions of women as a homogenous category, thus disavowing universalized and normalizing accounts of women as a group (Beasley, 1999). As such, post-modern and post-structuralist feminists reject the universal female subject that the movement constructed in the 1960s and 1970s, and also denounce the concomitant belief that the experiences and interests of all women are the same (Segal, 1999). Prominent traditional feminist accounts of 'women' were shown to speak only for the experiences of middle- and upper-class white Western women,

while ignoring crucial racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, and class differences between women (see for example, Collins, 1991; hooks, 1984; Reid, 1993).

A major enterprise of post-modern and post-structural feminists has been the deconstruction of female subjectivity and the analysis of the degree to which women's experiences of themselves as subjects are constructed within discourses and power relations (Grimshaw, 1993). These theorists shift the focus from looking at how women are similar to men (as in liberal feminism) or different to men (as, for example, in cultural feminism), to examining questions relating to the organization and the effects of power instead (Beasley, 1999).

Post-modern and post-structuralist feminists have drawn particularly on the work of Michel Foucault in their theory. Aspects of Foucault's work that have been taken up by feminists include the body as a site of power central to the constitution of subjectivity; the pervasive, discursive nature of power; and the intimate link between knowledge and power (Weedon, 1999). A central idea in Foucault's analysis of power is that power not only exists at the 'top-down' institutional level (for example, governments or monarchs having power), but that it permeates everyday life and interactions (Charles, 1996). Power is not a possession in the sense that it is something that people or groups 'have', but is rather a dynamic of non-centralized forces (Bordo, 1993). However, as Bordo (1993) points out, this understanding of power does not imply that there are no dominant social structures, positions, or ideologies - "the fact that power is not held by any*one* does not entail that it is equally held by *all.* It is 'held' by no one; but people and groups *are* positioned differently within it" (p. 191, emphasis in the original). From a Foucauldian perspective, power is constituted in, and lies in, discourses, as discourses produce the truths according to which individuals live their lives (Ramazanoğlu, 1993). Resistance to power comes through new discourses (counter discourses) which produce new truths and knowledges.

Within this framework, then, power is productive in the sense that it produces knowledges and truths, rather than straight-forward repression (Ramazanoğlu, 1993). People are produced within these ubiquitous power relations, in that they are constituted as subjects in discourses and disciplinary practices, and also contribute to the process of turning themselves into particular kinds of subjects (Ramazanoğlu, 1993). A Foucauldian analysis of power has been adopted in much of post-modern

and post-structuralist feminism, which sees power as pervasive and as regulating women's bodies and subjectivities in intricate and often subtle ways.

Incorporating post-modern and post-structural feminism into the present study seemed important because it provided a lens through which to analyze issues of gender, difference and power related to the transition into womanhood. This perspective allows for the posing and answering of questions such as 'how do societal conventions surrounding the transition maintain the status quo of unequal power relations between the sexes' and, relatedly, 'for what ends is this transition constructed in the way that it is'. It furthermore dovetails to a large extent with social constructionism in that it is inherently concerned with issues of plurality, subjectivity, and discourse, and is anti-essentialist in its approach.

3.4 Central concepts

Three concepts central to an understanding of the transition into womanhood are development, identity and gender. Firstly, issues of development are clearly important to this analysis as the transition into womanhood has traditionally been understood as a phase in the overall physical and psychological development of the female individual. Moreover, transitions throughout the lifespan are considered to fall within the realm of developmental psychology. Secondly, issues of identity are also clearly central, as the question of interest involves how individuals understand and construct their identities as 'girls' and 'women', and how 'becoming a woman' can be understood as involving a shift in identity. Moreover, adolescence and early adulthood, the period focused on in the present study, is widely portrayed within the literature as being a time during which issues of identity are most salient to the individual. Thirdly, given that this transition is clearly a gendered one (involving the gendered identities of 'girl' and woman'), it is important to clarify what is meant by the term 'gender'.

The following section will provide a discussion of these three central concepts. In each case, traditional notions of the concept will be compared to social constructionist and feminist accounts thereof.

3.4.1 Development

3.4.1.1 Traditional notions of development

As the present study involves the transition from girlhood to womanhood, it is concerned with issues of psychological development. The notion of development

has long been integral to psychology, and the science has one of its biggest branches, developmental psychology, dedicated to studying how human beings develop and mature through the lifecycle. Traditional developmental theories are concerned with the cognitive, affective, biological, and interpersonal variables that result in normal functioning at different life stages (Austrian, 2002). Development is seen as mainly determined by maturational factors, or the unfolding of one's genetic blueprint, which are roughly universal for all members of our species and which are understood as being largely separate from social context (Weiten, 2005).

Most of the widely accepted psychological theories explain how individuals develop by using a stage theory; that is, they postulate that all individuals progress through a series of similar steps until maturity is attained (Llewelyn & Osborne, 1990). Erik Erikson's stage theory is perhaps the most well-known of all the traditional psychological theories of development. Erikson (1963) posits that people evolve through eight stages over the life span, each marked by a psychosocial crisis. Of particular importance to the present study are the fifth and sixth stages of Erikson's formulation, namely the identity versus confusion stage of adolescence, and the intimacy versus isolation stage of early adulthood. According to Erikson (1968), a major challenge of adolescence is forming a clear sense of identity and the individual struggles between identity and confusion as potential outcomes. In early adulthood the key concern becomes developing the capacity to share intimacy with others, and a successful resolution of this stage promotes openness and empathy.

As the individual moves through life, he/she progresses from one stage to the next via a transitional period. According to Mercer, Nichols and Doyle (1982):

> Transitions can be defined as turning points, a point of reference from which a person's life course takes a new direction requiring adaptation or change in restructuring behaviours and roles appropriate to the new direction. In addition to change in behavioural responses and new roles, this new direction in the life course also requires change in responsibilities, goals, identity, and feelings about oneself in general. (p. 2)

Traditionally, psychological development has been regarded as synonymous with the process of individualization and separation from others, as is evidenced in the theories of Blos (1962), Erikson (1968), Levinson (1979) and other leading

developmental theorists. Within this framework, the aim of human development is the achievement of self-reliance, autonomy, and independence (Nelson, 1996).

3.4.1.2 Critiques of traditional notions of development

3.4.1.2.1 Social constructionism and development

The social constructionist perspective on human development differs from traditional perspectives in many significant ways. According to social constructionists, the concept of normal human development is a cultural construct which is based on social norms that change from one setting and era to another. From this perspective, concepts of normality are clearly influenced by values of the larger society, which are in turn determined by philosophical, historical, and religious influences (Austrian, 1999). The relationship between age and stage is as much culturally determined as it is biologically determined, and what we chose to define as life stages are social constructions. Indeed, one of the tenets of social constructionism is that categories with which human beings apprehend the world do not necessarily refer to real divisions (Ramazanoğlu, 2002).

However, social constructionists argue that the socially constructed nature of much of which developmental psychology is based on is rendered invisible within mainstream accounts. Because development is usually seen as occurring according to "inner laws of development" (Erikson, 1968, p. 93), the individual is de-contextualized from larger societal forces. An example hereof is the above-mentioned prevalent notion that individuals progress according to certain fixed and predictable stages during their life course. In fact, profound changes have occurred with regard to the ordering of thresholds over time, with ever-shifting boundaries between stages, and entirely new life stages, constantly emerging (Galland, 1995). The problem that researchers and others have in determining 'how old is a girl?', for example, demonstrates that girlhood is not a fixed period of time but, like other categories, is subject to historical and social specificities (Harris, 2004). As Harris (2004) notes:

> Currently, it seems that membership in the girl category is extending out at both ends: female children are becoming aware of a feminine identity at a younger age (hence the "tweenie" phenomenon), and women into their thirties and forties cheerfully describe themselves and their peers as girls. (p. 191)

Social constructionist accounts of development thus emphasize the influence of discourses on the ways that different life stages are constructed. Moreover, Lesko

(2001) argues that race, class, and gender are intricately woven into the norms for and concept of developmental stage. She notes that "racial, gender and class hierarchies are called from and revivified by the image and theory of development" (p.12) and it is this that should be the focus of critique, not the creation of different pathways to adulthood for different groups of girls and boys.

3.4.1.2.2 Feminism and development

Feminists reject traditional notions of development for ignoring the uniqueness of female development, and for assuming that females are supposed to follow the same developmental path as males (Josselson, 1990). As Jean Baker Miller (1991) contends, "almost every modern theorist who has tried to fit women into the prevalent developmental models have had ... obvious difficulty" (p. 12). Most conventional theories of development conceptualize male development as paradigmatic, so that 'normal' development is assumed to follow the male path (Llewelyn & Osborne, 1990), and girls and women are often understood as failing to attain the same level of maturity as boys and men (Gilligan, 1982).

In the 1970s feminist theorists therefore began to argue for new models of development that would better apply to women. Rather than considering female development deviant or inferior, feminist approaches sought to validate the way in which girls and women develop. There has thus been a major shift in how women's psychological development is conceptualized. Based primarily on the theories of Jean Baker Miller (1976), Nancy Chodorow (1978) and Carol Gilligan (1982), the notion of women having a 'separate line of development' gained prominence in psychology and the character and vicissitudes of female development are now considered to be strikingly different from those of male development (Zilbach, 1993). These theories on female development emphasize connection, interdependence, mutuality, and affiliation, replacing traditional notions of independence and autonomy with that of 'self-in-relationship' (Zilbach, 1993). The idea of a 'relational self' is considered to be more in tune with women's 'true nature' than the idea of an autonomous self and is seen as central to females' healthy development (Lykes, 1994).

However, earlier feminist developmental theories, such as those of Gilligan (1982) and Chodorow (1978), have been criticized from a post-modern perspective for being essentialist in their understanding of development and women (see for example Bohan, 1993). By insisting on an inherent relational nature of women's sense of self,

these theories fail to clarify how structural forces such as culture, ethnicity, race, and class influence psychological development (Lykes, 1994). Gilligan (1983), for instance, argues that women are by nature more relational than men and that girls (and not boys) are born with a "seemingly effortless ability to tune into the relational world" (p. 217). These theories thus provide limited insight into cultural and contextual variations in female developmental processes (Abrams, 2003). As Abrams (2003, p. 65) notes, "they did not address how young women negotiate their gender position among multiple identity possibilities and other salient axes of social difference".

3.4.1.2.3 Points of departure for this thesis

For the purposes of this study, development will be approached from a post-modern feminist and social constructionist perspective. It will be seen as being influenced by contextual factors, particularly discourses, and not merely as occurring according to "inner laws of development". Drawing on post-modern feminism, differences in the development of men and women will also be understood as originating not from essential differences between them, but from the gendered social context in which development takes place, which holds different norms and expectations for males and females.

3.4.2 Identity

3.4.2.1 Traditional notions of identity

Ruthellen Josselson (1990) provides a definition that encapsulates traditional perspectives of identity. Identity, she states, "is the stable, consistent, and reliable sense of who one is and what one stands for in the world" (p. 10). Modernist views of identity see it as a set of internal attributes (Sunderland & Litosseliti, 2002), a sense of self that is continuous and fixed over time. Indeed, as Budgeon (2003) points out, "the discourse of identity is distinctly modern, intrinsic to and partially constitutive of modernity" (p. 5). Moreover, within academic and scientific discourses, a unified identity is seen as a marker of healthy personality (Rishoi, 2003).

As noted above, adolescence is widely portrayed within the literature as being a time during which the individual is involved with issues of identity (for example, Erikson, 1963). James Marcia (cited in Weiten, 2005) suggested four identity statuses that the individual can adopt at this time, namely *identity diffusion* (an absence of a struggle over identity); *identity foreclosure* (the unquestioning adoption of parental or

societal values); *identity moratorium* (the active struggling for a sense of identity); and *identity achievement* (the successful achievement of a sense of identity). By late adolescence only a small number of individuals have attained *identity achievement*, which is the most mature of the identity statuses, and the struggle for a sense of identity is now believed to routinely extend into young adulthood (Weiten, 1995).

Erikson's (1968) perspective on female identity can be used as a case-in-point of traditional views of women's identity development. In his classic 1968 work *Identity: Youth and Crisis,* Erikson suggests different patterns of identity development for males and females. His theory sketches women's development as contingent on their relationship with men, with womanhood only being reached when the girl finds a husband. For example, Erikson states:

> Young women often ask whether they can "have an identity" before they know whom they will marry and for whom they will make a home. Granted that something in the women's identity must keep itself open for the peculiarities of the man to be joined and of the children to be brought up, I think that much of a young women's identity is already defined in her kind of attractiveness and in the selective nature of her search for a man (or men) by whom she wishes to be sought. (1968, p. 283)

While the main objective of the adolescent man is to learn to know himself and to acquire skills sufficient to pursue his life goals, for Erikson the girl's development task of adolescence is to find a man (Lott, 1981).

3.4.2.2 Critiques of traditional notions of identity

3.4.2.2.1 Social constructionism and identity

Both feminist and social constructionist approaches reject the traditional notions of identity as essentialist, and contest all essentialized identities such as 'woman' (Sunderland & Litosseliti, 2002). In general, social constructionism explicitly rejects any form of essentialism, the belief that the nature of things, including people, is determined by their internal properties or essences (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999). Essentialism involves depicting individuals "in terms of fundamental attributes that are conceived as internal, persistent, and generally separate from the on-going experience of interaction with the daily socio-political contexts of one's life" (Bohan, 1993, p. 7). Essences are understood to be natural (for example, beliefs about women's 'nature') and are used to explain and legitimize social characteristics,

relationships, and identities (Ramazanoğlu, 2002). Social constructionism is clearly at odds with essentialism in that it rather sees the social world as the product of social processes and, as such, posits that there cannot be any given, determined nature to the world or people (Burr, 1995). Anti-essentialists are concerned with interrogating the "intricate and interlacing processes" that work together to create the illusion of 'natural' processes and persons (Fuss, 1997, p. 251).

Thus, in opposition to conventional notions of identity, social constructionists argue that it is more useful to talk of plural 'identities', as identity is produced by multiple discourses (Sunderland & Litosseliti, 2002). Budgeon (2003) describes this idea of locating identity in the social realm:

> The historically specific social and material conditions that influence how identities are formed and maintained affect how we make sense of social relations and practices, as well as how we then live out identities in relation to others. Identity is about the relationship between the individual and society, agency and structure, the link between the self and the social, the self and other. (p. 7)

Post-structuralism paints a more complex picture of identity and subjectivity by suggesting that they are internally fractured and contradictory (Weedon, 1999). Focus is on the inherent instability of identity categories, on identity formation as a process, and on the heterogeneity of self (Budgeon, 2003). Identity is seen as multiple and fluid, often contradictory and never complete (Rishoi, 2003). Post-modern theories also claim a link between identities, subjectivities and power. However, a social constructionist approach to identity need not demand that identities such as woman/man or girl/woman be abandoned, but does insist that they should be interrogated. Such interrogation implies that their boundaries should be questioned and the constitution and crossings of their boundaries examined (Ramazanoğlu, 2002).

According to social constructionism, individuals continually negotiate their identity in the context of multiple and competing messages, discourses, and role possibilities (Abrams, 2003). Interest lies in how social structures such as gender, race, and class shape identity (Buscholtz, Liang & Sutton, 1999). Budgeon (2003), for example, notes that within the current early 21st century context, individuals are increasingly freed from the constraints of the ascribed identities that were in previous

times so tightly organized through factors such as gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and race, and, within these conditions of expanded choice, people therefore have wider freedom to construct their own identities. Individuals assemble their identities out of the discourses available in their culture and people's identities are "achieved by a subtle interviewing of many different threads" of discourses (Burr, 1995, p. 51). This interplay of discourses is continuously negotiated within the individual.

3.4.2.2.2 Feminism and identity

Feminists reject traditional accounts of identity that often portray girls as inherently unable to achieve the same degree of autonomous identity as boys. From a feminist perspective, girls face the dilemma of having to follow the hegemonic male path of becoming independent and separated from others, while simultaneously, based on the dictates of femininity, having to be nurturing and connected to others (Llewelyn & Osborne, 1990). As a result, feminists argue, the issue of independent identity formation is a difficult one for girls. They argue that traditional theories also fail to take into account the pressures on girls *not* to achieve an autonomous identity, given the demands on girls to be other-focused, passive and compliant (Llewelyn & Osborne, 1990). Post-modern and post-structuralist feminist work on identity problematizes gendered identities and subjectivities and shift from a concern with systematic gender divisions to a concern with gender identities based on difference (Charles, 1996).

3.4.2.2.3 Points of departure for this thesis

For the purposes of this thesis, identities will be understood from a social constructionist perspective as the complex and unfixed products of an inter-play of discourses that are continuously negotiated within the individual. Using a feminist perspective, it is recognized that conflicting discourses surrounding female identity (the need to be both independent and interconnected) may complicate young women's identity negotiations.

3.4.3 Gender

3.4.3.1 Traditional notions of gender

The notion of gender remains a very controversial one. Traditional perspectives on gender usually view men and women as naturally defined categories and as having distinctive psychological and behavioural characteristics that are ascribable to their reproductive functions (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Differences between men and women are often seen as fundamental, immutable, and as rooted in biology, while

structural arrangements in society are presumed to simply be the result of these 'natural' differences. An example of such 'biological determinism' is Sigmund Freud's belief that "anatomy is destiny", the principle that masculinity and femininity stem from the physical differences between males and females (quoted in Young-Buehl, 2002, p. 299). Traditional approaches thus portray gender as a fundamental attribute that is internal, permanent, and generally separate from the larger socio-political contexts within which the individual resides (Bohan, 1993). For example, accounts emphasize factors such as the evolutionary basis of gender differences, hormonal influences on gendered behaviour, differences in brain organization, operant conditioning and observational learning, and socialization through family and schools (Weiten, 2005).

3.4.3.2 Critiques of traditional notions of gender

3.4.3.2.1 Social constructionism and gender

Since the start of post-modernism within academia, traditional notions of gender as a static or biologically determined position have been largely replaced by the concept of gender as a dynamic, socially constructed category (Abrams, 2003). Within a social constructionist framework, gender can no longer be assumed to be a simple, natural fact (Flax, 1997). Social constructionism views gender not as being within a person, but as existing in contexts and interactions that are socially construed as gendered (Bohan, 1993). It is continually constituted and reconstituted according to the specific cultural and historical location (Glenn, 1999). From this perspective, one does not 'have' a gender, one 'does' gender by acting in accordance with expectations and norms of a specific gender (Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). As Bohan (1993) notes, gender:

> Is not an actual, free-standing phenomenon that exists inside individuals, to be discovered and measured by social scientists. Rather, "gender" is an agreement that resides in social interchange; it is precisely what we agree it to be. (p. 13)

As such, gender is not a natural category of being, but is produced inter-subjectively (Cosgrove, 2000). The traditional notion that gendered behaviour is an expression of stable, internal truths about the self is eschewed.

3.4.3.2.2 Feminism and gender

Feminism is largely responsible for developing the construct of gender as it is known today, and gender is the "workhorse concept" that lies at the heart of feminism (Olesen, 2000, p. 228). Indeed, as Jane Flax (1990) states, "the single most important advance in and result of feminist theories and practices is that the existence of gender has been problematized" (p. 21). The initial purpose of the concept of gender was to displace the role of biology in determining 'femininity' and 'masculinity' and to minimize the existence of any fundamental differences between the sexes (Segal, 1999). It provides feminists with an overarching rubric for examining cultural, historical, and situational differences in definitions of manhood and womanhood, as well as relationships between gender and meanings of femininity and masculinity.

Put simplistically, gender involves the socially constructed notions of how males and females are expected to act within a particular culture. It is a *social fact*, the difference between masculine and feminine roles (Connell, 1999). 'Femininity' can be understood as the attributes conventionally associated with being female in a particular culture (Macdonald, 1995). It is increasingly being recognized that the notion of femininity is not a single set of traits that charaterizes women in general, but can take on myriad forms depending on the class, race or age of the woman (Sato, 1998). Sex, in contrast, refers to the biological (chromosomal, hormonal, physiological) aspects that constitute males and females. It is a *biological fact*, the difference between the male and the female human animal (Connell, 1999). However, the extent to which sex is also a social construction has become a prominent issue in post-modern and post-structuralist theories of gender (for example, Butler, 1990). More recent feminist theories have questioned the stability of the sex/gender distinction, arguing that the idea of the biological 'nature' of sex, which is prior to culture and eternal, has outgrown its usefulness (Bartky, 1993).

Done from a modernist perspective, traditional accounts of gender are de-contextualized, placed within the individual, and focus on innate essential differences between men and women. In so doing contextual factors are rendered invisible, as are differences between women themselves. Post-modern feminists offer an alternative account of gender. They criticize traditional notions of gender for being essentialist and for ignoring the complexity of gendered behaviour, "which is situated in the ebb and flow of ongoing social relations" (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1994, p. 533). Post-modernists suggest that individual gendered subjectivity is produced within discourse. As Chris Weedon (1999) explains:

> Discourses define what it means to be a woman or a man and the available range of gender-appropriate and transgressive behaviour. We learn who we are and how to think and behave through discursive practices. Moreover, subjectivity is embodied, and discursive practices shape our bodies, as well as our minds and emotions, in socially gendered ways. (p. 104)

Over the past three decades the ways in which gender has been theorized within feminism has undergone significant changes (Charles, 1996). Second-wave assumptions of a shared oppression uniting women have been replaced by recognition of diversity and difference (Charles, 1996). As Bohan (1993) notes, "sex is only one of a multiplicity of axes that frame women's lives, to focus solely on sex as defining women's experiences is to homogenize all women and to present a unidimensional picture of a multidimensional reality" (p. 15). As such, issues of 'gender difference', and the extent to which this is discursively produced, have become central to post-modern feminism.

Moreover, post-modern feminism places the concept of 'womanhood' at centre stage (Delmas, cited in Beasley, 1999). Post-modern feminists emphasize the importance of women's personal experiences and subjectivity as a starting point for the development of theory and political practice. In recent years feminism has also come to represent a specific body of experience, namely the impact of being female and having a female body in modern-day society (Beasley, 1999). As Beasley (1999) notes:

> Despite the fact that feminists are increasingly inclined to view womanhood, female identity and female experience as diverse and unstable, notions of an embodied identity and experience are now more than ever placed as necessary to feminism's content, in the sense of defining who is a feminist. (p. 33)

A construct related to gender is that of 'gender identity'. 'Gender identity' involves one aspect (albeit a salient one) of the person - her or his involvement in gender relations or sexual practice (Connell, 1999). In recent decades post-modern and post-structuralist trends have questioned the construct of a core gender identity (for example, Butler, 1990) and have emphasized its fluidity. Conceptualizing gender identity as durable but not immutable allows for issues of agency, resistance and

subversion to emerge (McNay, 2000). Moreover, social constructionism has emphasized the important role that social context plays in mediating gender identities. As Abrams (2003) points out, "gender identities are embedded in several intersecting domains of social power and social difference" (p. 73). Gender identity is constructed in relation to a multitude of equally important axes of difference such as race, class and culture, which in turn inform gender (Abrams, 2003).

Importantly, much of feminist theory links gender and power (Griffin, 1996). Indeed, "were the two disconnected, there would be no need for feminism" (Segal, 1999, p. 42). Gender relations in present-day society are understood as relations of domination (Flax, 1990). The dictates of femininity are seen as largely oppressive to women and girls (Segal, 1999) and as accounting for women's social, political, and economic subordination (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990). However, as noted above, the way in which power has been understood by feminists varies (Charles, 1996). For example, Marxist feminists understand power to be linked to productive resources, while post-modern theorists, drawing on Foucault, conceptualise power as embedded in social relations and connected to every aspect of social life, even the constitution of the self (Charles, 1996).

Although the notion of power is one of the most significant aspects of feminist theory, it has also become one of the thorniest. Refuting the simplistic links between gender and power of earlier feminist theories, feminist academics today realize that gender relations are difficult to separate in practice from other power relations (Ramazanoğlu, 2002). Gender difference is understood as an effect of relations of power and knowledge that exist in all areas of life (Weedon, 1999). Feminism and Foucault come together in the notion that power not only exists at an institutional level but also within the context of everyday life (Charles, 1996). Within this framework, power is productive and not merely coercive – for example, it constructs subjectivities and identities (Beasley, 1999). The body is also seen as a site for the operations of power – as Foucault put it: "[power] seeps into the very grain of individuals, reaches right into their bodies, permeates their gestures, their posture, what they say, how they learn to live and work with other people" (quoted in Beasley, 1999, p. 94).

3.4.3.2.3 Points of departure for this thesis

Social constructionist and post-modern feminist accounts of gender will be used to inform the present study. As such, gender and gendered identity will be understood

as intrinsically linked with discourses and issues of power and difference, and will be understood as intersecting with other domains of social power and social difference, such as class and race.

3.4 Conclusion

In the present study, taken-for-granted notions concerning the distinction between 'girls' and 'women' and what it means to 'become' a woman will be explored using a social constructionist and post-modern feminist approach. From a social constructionist perspective, 'woman' and 'girl' will be understood not as some internal, essentialist identity, but as a social construct, the meaning of which is constructed through the everyday relational context of discourse. Likewise, a post-modern feminist perspective will look at how issues surrounding this transition may be constructed to maintain the unequal power relationship between the sexes and how subordinating discourses shape the bodies, emotions and behaviour of young women.

Moreover, despite social constructionist, feminist and traditional theories of female development, identity and gender, a sound theoretical explanation of the transition into womanhood is still lacking. Problems with hegemonic accounts confirm the need for more socially embedded and contextually grounded theories when looking at female development (Lykes, 1994).

4. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the theoretical framework that informed the current study was discussed in depth. In this chapter the actual methodology of the current study will be explained and the methods used will be described. The chapter will start with a discussion of the implications of a feminist social constructionist framework for the methodology, followed by a detailed description of the methods employed in the present study. Next, ethical considerations related to the study, as well as issues concerning validation, are discussed. The chapter ends with a discussion of issues pertaining to reflexivity.

4.2 Methodological background

The methodologies used in the present study were social constructionist methodology, feminist methodology, and qualitative methodology, approaches which are integrated ontologically and epistemologically with the feminist social constructionist theoretical framework discussed above.

4.2.1 Social constructionist methodology

Research using a social constructionist approach involves the study of ways in which social constructions are produced, how they change across culture and history, and how they shape people's experiences (Willig, 2001). Working from this methodology requires an alternative approach to psychological research, one in which the aim of the investigation is not 'truth' in the traditional, positivist sense (Durrheim, 1997), because post-modern thought rejects any notion of methodology as being able to produce knowledge that straightforwardly describes reality (Ramazanoğlu, 2002). The post-modern deconstructive currents in social constructionist research encourage the unpacking of taken-for-granted ideas existing in specific cultural and historic contexts (Olesen, 2000). Within this framework research results are understood as a representation, not an exact replica, of what exists 'out there' in reality (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990).

4.2.2 Feminist methodology

No one kind of feminist research or method exists and debate abounds over appropriate methodologies within feminism. However, one of the primary goals of feminist research is to bring about social change, particularly by "giving voice" to the girls and women that it studies, and, in so doing, to empower them and learn from

their experiences (Ramazanoğlu, 2002). As Allen and Baber (1992) put it: "the feminist goal is to do research *for* women rather than *about* women" (p. 9, emphasis in original). This goal also serves to counter the predominantly androcentric worldview that characterizes much of Western academia – one which mainly communicates male experience and is based on male perspectives – by incorporating female experiences and perspectives. Furthermore, post-modern feminism's belief in the diversity among women (as discussed in the previous chapter it is increasingly being recognized that women do not form a monolithic group), suggests a basic need to study different groups of women, as is the case in the present study.

4.2.3 Qualitative methodology

The term 'qualitative research' refers to an assortment of methodological and theoretical assumptions (Murray & Chamberlain, 2000). Although varied in its approach, qualitative research is chiefly concerned with meaning (*verstehen*), in that interest lies in how people make sense of the world and in the meanings that people bring to events (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003). Such research provides insight into individual perspectives that are rendered invisible in quantitative approaches and allow for the description and interpretation of subjective experience (Murray & Chamberlain, 2000). As such, issues of subjectivity lie at the heart of qualitative research (Mason, 2002). In addition, qualitative methods are unparalleled in their capacity to produce arguments of how things work in particular contexts (Mason, 2002). As Jennifer Mason (2002) notes, "the qualitative habit of intimately connecting context with explanation means that qualitative research is capable of producing very well-founded *cross-contextual generalities*, rather than aspiring to more flimsy de-contextual versions" (p. 1, emphasis in the original). Moreover, qualitative studies allow the researcher to explore the texture and weave of everyday life; the subjective understandings, experiences and beliefs of the participants; the way in which social processes and discourses work; and the significance of the meanings that they generate (Mason, 2002). These key characteristics of qualitative research made it the methodology of choice for the present study, which is interested in subjectivity, experience, and processes. Quantitative methodology was considered inappropriate for meeting the aims of this study, as it offers limited access to accounts of context, subjectivity, and nuances of meaning, factors considered integral to attaining a comprehensive answer to the research question.

4.3 Methods

4.3.1 Research question

The main research question that the present study aimed to answer was "how do young women themselves experience the transition from girlhood to womanhood?" This involved determining how young South African women construct and negotiate their gendered identities as 'girls' and 'women'. More specifically, this study aimed to 1) investigate whether the distinction between girlhood and womanhood was significant, 2) determine whether the transition into womanhood was an important one for young women, and 3) document how these young women experienced the transition.

4.3.2 Research context

The present study was situated parallel to a larger research endeavour, the Women's Mental Health Research Project (WMHRP), which is focused on the psychological distress and resilience of low-income women of colour residing in the Winelands region of the Western Cape. The WMHRP is an in-depth, mostly qualitative investigation of how these women interpret and give meaning to their experiences. The present study is aligned with the broader project in that it was conducted in the same geographical area, also followed a social constructionist approach, and was also concerned with how women construct their identities within broader social and cultural contexts. However, the present study's focus fell more specifically on notions of girlhood, womanhood, and the transition into womanhood. The data obtained were also not directly part of the WMHRP's data as separate interviews were conducted with participants to allow for a more detailed focus on the areas of interest.

The sample was in the first place heuristic, in that it was a means of gaining access to participants from two different social backgrounds. This in turn allowed the study to focus on how participants' identities as girls or women might be differently negotiated and constructed in different social contexts. The aim was to, in Driscoll's (2002) words, "analyze how girls are articulated in specific sites rather than attempting to define what links girls across different contexts" (p. 5). In the second place, it was also useful to the study in that provided a glimpse of the different psychological worlds that interviewers and potential interviewees live in. As the present study was concerned with how social context shapes young women's gender identity negotiations, it was also interested in comparing the results obtained from WMHRP participants with another group of women, particularly the mainly white,

middle-class students who would typically be the researchers/interviewers in the WMHRP.

4.3.3 *Participants*

Two groups of participants were recruited. The University group consisted of five female postgraduate psychology students who were interviewers for the WMHRP, while the Community group was made up of five females who would typically become interviewees in the WMHRP. The two groups lived in two different towns in the Winelands region and were distinguished by socio-economic class, language, and race. The Community group was coloured, working-class, and Afrikaans-speaking, while the University group was largely white, middle-class to upper-class, and English and Afrikaans speaking. In this thesis, code names from the University group's participants will be followed by **(U)**, while code names from the Community group's participants will be followed by **(C)**. A table detailing the participants' prominent demographic data is provided in Appendix A.

It was assumed that the use of two different groups of participants would provide greater insight into the influence of context on the transition into womanhood, a variable which social constructionist and qualitative research are inherently concerned with. As Jennifer Mason (2002) expresses it:

> One of the driving logics of some forms of qualitative research is that whatever it is we seek to investigate, it is likely to be complex, nuanced, situated and contextual. If we sample strategically across a range of contexts, we increase our chances of being able to use that very detail not only to understand how things work in specific contexts, but also how things work differently or similarly in other relevant contexts. (p. 125)

An emphasis on context also acknowledges the heterogeneity of women's lives, and recognizes that "the experienced reality of womanhood [is] not unproblematic or homogenous, but internally differentiated in cross-cutting ways" (Ransom, 1993, p. 125). As Abrams (2003) has rightly argued, "it would be both misleading and exclusionary to examine gender identity among young women without addressing the contextual variations that inform the very meaning of gender itself" (p. 73). In addition, incorporating different contexts into the study allowed for the examination of differences between groups in order to determine how this difference may have practical implications, particularly for research on women.

For the purposes of this study, and in keeping with recent trends in feminist theory, race and socio-economic class will not be seen as independent, parallel processes, but focus will be on their "interactive, reciprocal and cumulative effects" (Chow, 1996, p. xxi). Likewise, race and gender will be conceptualized interactively, and it is recognized that they "combine to produce race-specific gender effects that generate important experiential cleavages among women" (Dugger, 1996, p. 32). As Chow (1996) notes, "the interlocking of race, class and gender produces distinct social conditions and experiences for women and men in different times and places" (p. xxii).

Age was an important factor in recruitment because, as the area of interest was the transition into womanhood, it was preferred that participants be involved or recently involved with this process, rather than older women who would presumably not be as involved herein. As such, the age of participants ranged from 19 years to 25 years. Another reason for participants being homogenous in terms of age was that, given the social constructivist approach, historical context was considered important. The focus of the present study was on current constructions, understandings, and discourses of what it means to 'become a woman', rather than constructions thereof from previous decades. Moreover, as Williams (2002) has argued, "including the voices of young women is vital to our research. We as gender scholars have been remiss in failing to include adolescent women in our discourse" (p. 49).

4.3.4 *Sampling*

Purposive sampling was initially used for both groups. Each group consisted of five participants, totalling 10 altogether. Members of the University group were recruited through an invitation to participate extended to them during a regular meeting of all the WMHRP interviewers. Those who met the age criteria (were no older than 23) were provided with an information pamphlet about the study and were asked to write down their names and contact details on a sheet provided. They were subsequently telephoned and arrangements were made for the interview. In terms of the Community group, three of the five participants from that group were recruited from a pool of participants that had previously participated in the WMHRP. Only those individuals who were no longer participants in the WMHRP study (who had completed all the interviews set for that study), and who met the age requirements of the present study were telephoned and invited to participate. One participant had withdrawn from the WMHRP study before completing all four of its interviews. As the

WMHRP was involved in a study on mothers at the time, most of the Community group participants had a child. All of the individuals telephoned agreed to participate, with the exception of someone who was in the process of moving out of the community.

To help advance the richness and scope of the data and to allow certain assumptions to be tested, certain participants were selected through theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling involves selecting participants on the basis of their relevance to the research question, the theoretical position used, and the argument being developed (Mason, 2002). These participants were included because they differed from the rest of the participants of their group in an interesting and presumably significant way, most notably in terms of age and cultural/racial background. For the University group, all of the participants were white and middle class, with the exception of a coloured participant from a working-class background. For the Community group, two exceptions were a participant who was not a mother, in order to gage the influence of motherhood on the transition into womanhood for that group, and an older participant who was in her mid 20s, to determine the effect of age. Saturation of conceptual information determined sample size.

4.3.5 *Data collection*

Individual in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted by myself. Each participant was interviewed once, the interview lasting on average between one and a half and two hours. Data were collected over a 14-month period. A pilot interview was first conducted to ensure that questions were clear and unambiguous and to refine the interview schedule.

All of the interviews were conducted in the language of choice of the participants, which was Afrikaans for the Community group and English for the University group. Interviews with the University group were conducted in a private interviewing room at the university at a time and date convenient to the participants. Interviews with the Community group participants were conducted in a private consultation room in their local clinic, although the participants were given the option of conducting the interview elsewhere if preferred. Again, interviews were conducted at a time and date convenient to the participant.

4.3.6 *Measuring instruments*

Topics covered during the interview were exclusively in the area of interest, namely participants' understanding of what it is to be a 'woman' and a 'girl', as well as how they understood a girl 'becomes' a woman, which was the main focus of the interview. To a lesser extent, the interview schedule also included questions on how they believed the processes of 'becoming a woman' was different or similar to becoming a man, and how, if at all, they thought the notions of womanhood had changed in recent decades. What was meant by 'becoming a woman' was purposefully not specified so as not to shape the participants' own description of this ambiguous term. The aim was to learn how 'becoming a woman' was constituted and understood by the participants themselves.

After the open-ended questions, which was the main part of the interview, participants were asked to rate how important they believed, based on their own experience, certain events were to 'becoming a woman'. Participants were asked to rate, from one to ten, the importance of events such as motherhood, menarche, living away from home, and losing one's virginity, a score of ten indicating the event was very significant to 'becoming a woman'. The purpose hereof was not to collect quantitative data, but to tap participants' beliefs about aspects that may not have been specifically addressed or mentioned in the open-ended part of the interview. The interview schedule is provided in Appendix B.

4.3.7 *Data management*

All of the interviews were audio taped with the permission of the participants. They were all transcribed by myself using Silverman (1993) and Reissman's (1993) transcription guidelines.

4.3.8 *Data analysis*

The data were analyzed using a social constructionist lens. Analysis was based on the transcripts of the interviews and was carried out according to grounded theory protocol, specifically the constructivist version of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2003; Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003). The constructivist approach to grounded theory dovetails to a large extent with social constructionism and argues that categories and explanations do not emerge from the data, but are constructed by the researcher through interaction with the data (Charmaz, 2002). From this perspective, the results of a grounded theory analysis are not presumed to capture reality, instead they are themselves seen as a social construction of reality (Willig, 2001). The researcher engages with the text and brings his or her assumptions to the task, while

constructing, rather than discovering, a meaningful and useful account of the phenomenon in question (Murray & Chamberlain, 2000).

There are a number of reasons why grounded theory protocol was chosen to analyze the data. Firstly, grounded theory offers researchers an accepted, formal set of procedures for guiding qualitative inquiry. Its principles and methods are acknowledged to promote creativity in conceptualizing, as well as rigorous analysis of qualitative data (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003), and grounded theory procedures allow for the development of well-integrated concepts that provide a thorough theoretical explanation of the phenomenon under question (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Secondly, the constructivist version of this method fitted well with the ontological and epistemological assumptions inherent in the present study. Moreover, grounded theory aims to explain social and psychological processes (Charmaz, 2002), which was the focus of the present study. Thirdly, in grounded theory, codes fit the data rather than forcing data into preconceived codes, thus allowing for a better fit between the analysis and the data. As a grounded theory analysis is 'grounded' in the data from which it emerges, it does not involve simply testing hypotheses. Rather, it allows a theory rooted in the actual accounts and experiences of the participants to be constructed. As such, Corbin and Strauss (1990) note that grounded theory is useful in areas where limited research has been done, because it allows for the generation of hypotheses and the formulation of theory. Since very little empirical work has been done on 'becoming a woman', a grounded theory analysis held the additional advantage of providing a tentative theoretical explanation of how girls come to see themselves as women.

Analysis entailed three levels of coding. Initial *line-by-line coding* involved examining each line of the data and defining the events or actions occurring in it (Charmaz, 2003). These conceptual labels were then compared with others for similarities and differences. Conceptually similar events were then grouped together to form categories in *focused coding.* During this level the most frequent and significant codes identified in the line-by-line coding were used to sift through the data, allowing for a more selective, directed, and conceptual analysis of the data (Charmaz, 2003). Next, focused codes were raised to *conceptual categories* to allow for the development of an analytic framework. The data were analyzed individually and then compared across interviews and groups, allowing recurrent themes and patterns in the data to emerge. Memos were written for each category, which explicated its

properties, demonstrated how the category related to the other categories, and specified the conditions under which the category operated (Charmaz, 2003).

Throughout the study the data were continuously revisited, allowing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon to emerge. Participants' accounts were understood as tapestries into which personal and cultural values and meanings were woven (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003). Data were also read interpretively and reflexively, rather than literally and superficially (Mason, 2002), allowing me to construct a version of what I thought the data meant or represented, and what I thought I could infer from them. As Coffey and Atkinson (1996) note, the purpose of coding is not to simplify the data, but to open them up for further analysis by going beyond the data, asking the data questions, and generating explanatory theories and frameworks.

4.4 Ethical considerations

Participation in the present study was entirely voluntary; participants could refuse to answer any questions and could end the interview at any time. The purpose and context of the research was explained to each participant prior to the interview and any questions that the participant had were answered. Each participant signed an informed consent form (see Appendix D). As use was made of code names, the participants' actual names were never used on the audiotapes or texts, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. There was no risk of physical harm to the participants.

4.5 Validation

Yardley (cited in Smith, 2003) offers three broad principles for ensuring validity in qualitative research. The first involves *sensitivity to context.* Such sensitivity can be achieved by showing an awareness of the existing theoretical and empirical literature on a topic, and also by attending to how the socio-cultural milieu in which the study takes place influences its conduct and outcome (Smith, 2003). The theoretical and empirical context within which the present research took place has been delineated for the reader in the two previous chapters. Moreover, socio-cultural context is inherently important to the present study, which is concerned with the contextual variations in how the participants construct their identities as girls or women. Yardley's second broad principle includes *rigour, transparency and coherence.* The first refers to the appropriateness of the study's sample and to the completeness of the analysis (Smith, 2003). Given that the present study was interested in both how young women subjectively understand their transition into womanhood and the role

that context plays in this process, a sample consisting of young women going through the transition and who came from two very different contexts was considered well suited to answer the research question. *Transparency* and *coherence* "refer to how clearly the stages of the research process are outlined in the write-up of the study" (Smith, 2003, p. 233), issues which were addressed in the present chapter. Yardley's third principle of validity in qualitative research is *impact* and *importance*. A vital test of a study's validity is determined by whether it provides results that may be useful or important to the existing work that has been done in an area. It is hoped that the findings of the present study meet these criteria by shedding light on a neglected area of female development, and by broadening the discussion about how young women negotiate their gender identities. In addition, results provide possible answers to the question of how young women themselves subjectively understand their transition into womanhood to occur, and offer insight into the role that social context plays in this process.

The validity of the present study was also enhanced by using theoretical sampling to increase the depth of analysis, as well as by using an accepted and systematic data analysis procedure, namely constructivist grounded theory.

4.6 Reflexivity

4.6.1 Personal reflexivity

Qualitative research recognizes that issues of subjectivity lie at the heart of research - not only is the participant's subjectivity important, but so too is that of the researcher. From this perspective, the researcher cannot be objective, neutral, or detached from the knowledge and evidence that they are generating (Mason, 2002). Factors related to my own transition into womanhood influenced why the research question was chosen; how the participants were selected; how the interview schedule was drawn up; and how the categories were constructed from the data.

Firstly, I began the present study at the beginning of my own transition into womanhood. At 21 years of age, I felt that I 'should' already be a woman, but in many ways still felt like a girl. How I was supposed to go about becoming a woman, however, was elusive, and the question of how the transition into womanhood actually occurs began to puzzle me. Given the importance of the notion of 'woman' to feminism and psychology alike, I initially thought that there would be an abundance of theories and studies on how girls negotiate becoming women. To my surprise, however, virtually no one seemed to have addressed the question of how

girls 'become' women. This was a transition through which all females were supposed to go during their lifetime, yet it was one that had been largely ignored in the empirical and theoretical literature. What had started as a question of personal interest to me thus evolved into one of academic interest.

Secondly, my personal experience also shaped the age of participants selected for the present study. Based on my own experiences, I did not feel that the location of the transition was during early and middle adolescence, as much of the literature was purporting. As such, I decided to make my participants older (mainly in their early twenties), based on the age when I felt I was 'becoming a woman', and which might be more in tune with current generations' experiences. It is recognized that being the same age as the participants in the present study, and thus interviewing my peers, may have both focused and blurred my perspective. On the one hand, it may have made me more approachable to the participants, and made seeing the world through their eyes easier, as I could readily identify with the broader societal contexts of young womanhood that they operated in. On the other hand, being embedded in the same experiences and discourses as the participants may have made it more difficult to realize the situated nature of our cohorts' perspectives and to recognize the differences between current notions of 'becoming a woman' and those of previous eras.

Thirdly, due both to the lack of empirical work on the research topic and to the grounded theory belief in theoretical agnosticism at the beginning of research, the interview schedule was not drawn up with a particular theory or hypothesis in mind, but was also largely determined by my own experiences of the transition into womanhood. However, since it would have been undesirable for my own ideas to constrain participants' accounts, semi-structured interviews were used and open-ended questions were asked to allow for the participants' own stories and understandings to emerge. Also, at the end of each interview, the participant was asked if they felt there was anything pertinent to the topic that had not been asked or discussed, to allow other explanations of the transition into womanhood to be voiced and explored.

Finally, it is recognized that my own background as the researcher largely influenced how the results of the present study were constructed. Being female, white, and middle-class led me to approach the research question from a situated perspective,

one that may well have produced different conclusions to those drawn by someone from a different background.

4.6.2 Epistemological reflexivity

Clearly, the research question could have been addressed in a myriad of different ways. By using a specific epistemological approach, a specific version of reality was created, one that may differ significantly from other approaches to the research question. Perhaps most fundamentally, a quantitative approach could have been taken in which more participants could have been recruited and which would have been more focused on traditional criteria of generalizability and reliability. From this perspective, of course, the current design does not allow one to generalize further than the participants used and results are unlikely to prove replicable in the traditional, positivist sense. Furthermore, the social constructionist approach used in the present study defined what could be 'found', in that the object of the inquiry was not 'truth', but rather identifying the ways in which the transition into womanhood was constructed and tracing the implications of these constructions (Willig, 2001). The use of social constructionism determined the purpose of the present study and resulted in the location of the inquiry lying in the social realm rather than in the intrapersonal realm.

4.7 Conclusion

In summary, in this study the research question of "how do young women themselves experience the transition from girlhood to womanhood?" was approached using social constructionist, feminist, and qualitative methodologies. More specifically, this study aimed to 1) investigate whether the distinction between girlhood and womanhood was significant, 2) determine whether the transition into womanhood was an important one for young women, and 3) document how these young women experience the transition. The data were gathered from two groups of participants, the University and the Community group, through the use of semi-structured interviews. The University group consisted of five mostly white middle-class female psychology student in their early twenties who served as interviewers for the WMHRP. The Community group was composed of five mostly working-class, coloured participants in their late teens and early twenties who would typically be interviewed by the University group during research. Participants were sampled purposively and theoretically. Analysis occurred according to constructivist grounded theory protocol and was based on the interview transcripts. The validity of the study was enhanced through the use of theoretical sampling and through the use of an

accepted and systematic data analysis procedure (constructivist grounded theory). In addition, issues of subjectivity inherent to the present study were made clear to the reader.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the present study and a discussion of these results. Results are laid out according to the three main categories that were constructed from the data, namely the girl/woman dichotomy, the "woman imperative", and the different processes experienced during the transition into womanhood. Firstly, the girl/woman dichotomy is presented with a discussion of the similarities between the two groups' accounts, specifically in terms of the physical and psychological characteristics of girls and women. Differences between the groups in terms of this category are then described. Secondly, the "woman imperative", or the participants' felt need to become women, is discussed. Thirdly, the different processes experienced when constructing an identity as a woman are covered by looking at whether the participants understood the transition to occur along a continuum or according to discrete stages, as well as by looking at differences in the nature of the identities constructed by the two groups. The chapter ends with concluding comments on the results and discussion.

5.2 The girl/woman dichotomy

The first factor that the interview schedule tried to gauge was the participants' understandings of the differences between 'girls' and 'women'. It was found that participants from both groups clearly delineated between the constructs of 'girl' and 'woman' in that these two categories were portrayed as mutually exclusive and described in terms of a girl/woman dichotomy. Thus, in terms of the research question of whether participants distinguish between girlhood and womanhood, it can be argued that this is indeed the case. The similarities and differences in the two groups' accounts will be discussed in turn.

5.2.1 Similarities between the groups

The University and Community group both understood there to be differences between 'girls' and 'women' in terms of physical variables (related to their body) and psychological variables (related to their thoughts, cognitions, emotions and behaviour). Physical characteristics involved looking like a girl/woman, while psychological characteristics involved thinking and feeling like a girl/woman, and acting like a girl/woman.

5.2.1.1 Physical characteristics of girls and women

5.2.1.1.1 Looking like a girl/woman

One of the main ways in which both groups of participants differentiated between girls and women was in terms of their physiology. This was particularly with regard to, firstly, their body shape and menstruation and, secondly, the extent to which their physical appearance conformed to societal expectations of femininity.

Breasts and menses were considered by both groups to be salient biological markers of womanhood. The University group in particular understood womanhood in terms of physical appearance. The following descriptions of women and girls highlight their physicality:

> Janice (U): I associate the word 'girl' with somebody I think either in some cases, but not necessarily for everybody, that hasn't had their period yet ... and who has little tits that must still grow bigger.

> Deborah (U): Well the picture that comes to my mind of a girl *physically* is more a sporty sort of straight-lined kind of figure ... It's just the curves and the breasts and the hips and longer hair.

> Angela (U): Voluptuous, that image comes to mind, a voluptuous woman.

The importance of having the biological markers of womanhood was considered paramount – not having characteristics such as breasts or menstruation in many ways precluded one from being a woman. As Janice (U) notes:

> I'm not saying you have to look like Pamela Anderson, but there needs to be those things that distinguishes you from men. And you don't have to have the perfect body in order to have that, but there needs to be those things so that you can physically feel this body that I'm in is a body of a woman, and it needs to differ in certain areas in order for you to feel different from a man ... You need to see the person has well-rounded hips and breasts. You see something like that and you know it's a woman and not a man ... But if you don't have that, or if you have it to a very lesser extent, then it becomes a bit shaky.

However, while fulfilling these physical criteria was essential in order to be considered a 'woman', participants did not consider having a womanly body as enough to be considered a 'woman'. Indeed, as Simone de Beauvoir noted, "every female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be so considered she must share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity" (1963, p. 5). As described by both groups of participants, to enter the realm of womanhood the female body also had to be feminine or, as Mary (U) put it, the woman had to be "pretty and put together".

A major part of feminizing the body was the notion of shaping the physical self to conform to societal standards of femininity and beauty. Margaret (U) explains her understanding of what it is to be feminine:

> Flowers and perfume and makeup and the way a lady presents herself as ladylike, you know? Just the way she sits and eats and talks, just like a *lady*. You know, just *not like a man.*

Connell (1999) has argued that it is through factors such as dress and deportment that bodies are materially transformed and individuals present themselves as gendered. In this way and "in the most extraordinary detail [the] body's responses reflect back, like the mirrors on an Indian dress, a kaleidoscope of social meanings" (Connell, 1987, p. 83). How the individual dresses and behaves thus plays an important role in whether they see themselves and others as girls or women and has the power to confer meaning onto the individual. For example, Lindy (C) noted that she felt that other people saw her more as a girl than as a woman. When asked what she felt had to happen for others to see her as a woman, Lindy replied "I probably have to dress in grownup clothes, dress up more like a grownup, do my hair like a grownup's".

The inter-play between societal expectations of femininity and the embodied experience of girlhood and womanhood is exampled in the following quotes:

> Janice (U): Being a woman people always expect you to act in a certain way, look like, you know, you're supposed to look like, you can't like dress like all, how can I say, people don't see you in the same light as a guy or a man, obviously, because you also need to look like you're looked after, you need to look clean and proper and stuff like that.

> Lindy (C): Now when you become a young girl then they say you must now start to dress up. You must make yourself pretty now. Now you must have those new tekkies and you must have that new jean over there.
>
> Mary (U): For me to be a woman is to be feminine.
>
> Margaret (U): What society yells at us is you have to be pretty and go shopping every week and wear beautiful new clothes and wear this and this perfume ... you know it's all just physical, you know physically orientated.

Second-wave feminist analysis has long been interested in the relationship between women and the "politics of appearance" (Bordo, 1993, p. 194), particularly in terms of power. The focus of this analysis is on how women discipline and survey their bodies by moulding them according to idealized discursive constructions of feminine embodiment (Budgeon, 2003). Bartky (1990) explains the "psychological oppression" (p. 29) resulting from the cultural preoccupation with women's appearance:

> It is a fact that women in our society are regarded as having a virtual duty to "make the most of what we have." ... What is presupposed by this is that we don't look good enough already, that attention to the ordinary standards of hygiene would be insufficient, that there is something wrong with us as we are. Here the "intimations of inferiority" are clear: Not only must we continue to produce ourselves as beautiful bodies, but the bodies we have to work with are deficient to begin with. ... [T]he body I am to be, never sufficient unto itself, stands forever in need of plucking or painting, of slimming down or fattening up, of firming or flattening. (p. 29)

This is particularly evident in contrast to male embodied experiences. As Ronel (C) notes:

> A man is always 'never mind'. Not 'never mind' – he's just there, like my mom says 'a man is baked and left to set'. A woman always needs that extra care. A woman must look pretty. A man will dress just as he wants and look just like he wants ... It's about how you look, your appearance, your clothes and so on. In terms of men there is *definitely* a difference between the two. But

> it's just about how you (put yourself together), how you dress, and how you look to others.

In contradiction to factors such as menstruation and breast size, which are largely out of the individual's control, the extent to which the individual conformed to the notion of femininity was understood to be under their control. As a result, both groups showed little sympathy for individuals who were considered unfeminine. For example, when asked if she would consider someone who does not meet the requirements of femininity as being a complete woman, Katrina (C) replied:

> No. They cannot take responsibility for themselves. They cannot look after themselves. A woman must really look after herself. She can't be messy. It's a slap in the other woman's face ... When you're a woman you must look after yourself.

Similarly, Margaret (U) notes:

> You can be a woman and not be feminine because you can have the attributes that make you a woman and not have that ladylike-ness about you. There are a lot of women like that. I don't want to use the word, *the* word, you know the descriptive word, so I'm not going to but you can be a woman and not be a lady.

Again, comments such as these can be explained by using post-structuralist and post-modernist feminist perspectives that have analyzed issues of femininity, subjectivity, and identity in terms of power. Within post-modern and poststructuralist accounts of power, prevailing forms of self-hood and subjectivity are not maintained through coercion or physical restraint, but rather through individual self-surveillance and self-correction to norms (Bordo, 1993). From this perspective, young women like the participants in the present study reproduce the subordinating feminine practices of our culture through self-normalization to the everyday dictates and habits of femininity (Bordo, 1993). As Bartky (1993) expresses it:

> The woman who checks her make-up half a dozen times a day to see if her foundation has caked or her mascara run, who worries that the wind or rain may spoil her hair do ... who, feeling fat, monitors everything she eats, has

> become, just as surely as the inmate of the panopticon, a self-policing subject, a self committed to a relentless self-surveillance. (p. 80)

Dominant discourses of femininity can be seen as helping to maintain women's subordinate position in society by setting narrow and idealized expectations of what it means to be an adult of a specific gender, one in which the demands are much higher for women than for men. The power of these expectations is evident on the everyday, individual level when young women who do not adhere to the standards are 'punished' by being considered to be 'less' of a woman, and when individual young women experience anxiety about not attaining these standards. Lindy (C) provides an example of the desire to conform to these ideals and explains how it feels not to meet them:

> I really want to start pushing my weight up. I purposefully eat a lot, but it doesn't help at all. I also want to, how can I say, look pretty and feel like a woman. Comfortable in clothes, without them hanging. How can I say, they don't look right. Like I perhaps put jeans on and the jeans don't fit like they should. So in a way then, I feel like, not bad, I feel sad, or I feel disappointed in myself, because you feel more, how can I say, that self-confidence, you don't have it anymore because things don't look right on you anymore. Nothing fits right anymore, it doesn't look nice anymore. I don't want to go out anymore. So it's just that kind of feeling, type of feeling that a person gets. You don't look pretty anymore and nothing fits right anymore and when I walk in the street I feel people are watching me.

In Lindy's description we can see Foucault's argument that the body is a site for operations of power – her distress about not 'looking right' and her efforts to rectify this, evidences her role in turning herself into a subject that is in line with dominant discourses of femininity. Moreover, her words of "look pretty and feel like a woman" highlight the close connection between having a feminine appearance and having an identity as a woman. Post-modern and post-structuralist theories in particular emphasize the complex relationship between identity and embodiment. Weedon (1999) has argued that post-structuralism "suggests that embodied subjectivity is an effect of discourses that produce multiple and often contradictory modes of subjectivity" (p. 116). Participants' understanding of themselves as girls or women were largely tied to what extent they embodied these constructs. For example, Janice (U) states:

> And that's why I'm saying even if I'm 23 years old today and you ask me that question [do you see yourself as a girl or a woman?] I'll say to you 'well, I don't think I can really become a woman until I get all the stuff that's associated with being a woman, like the stretch marks and the titties and those kinds of stuff' ... I felt I can't be a woman until the day I actually have breasts that people can see and not have to zoom in to see what is that, you know.

Not physically looking like a woman "should" look precluded some of the participants from considering themselves to be complete women and underscores the important relationship between identity, discourse, and embodiment.

5.2.1.2. Psychological characteristics of girls and women

5.2.1.2.1 Thinking and feeling like a girl/woman

Women were consistently described by both groups as responsible, strong, nurturing, sensible, experienced, and confident. Both groups of participants provided a much idealized picture of womanhood, one in which the woman is seen as supremely capable. For example:

> Hennelene (C): The woman is always the stronger one. Of the sexes the woman is to me the stronger one. The person that has to carry the majority of the responsibilities and someone who has a very strong self-image.

> Lindy (C): You're more sensible, you can communicate better with people, also not as lighthearted. You tell yourself 'I am big now and I can accept things better' ... I think of someone who, how can I say, a person who maybe, who is brave, she's someone who can do everything, can handle everything ... You're more steady or what do they call it, you can think more positively about things.

> Mary (U): I think women need to be strong and intelligent and be able to fulfil their own needs in each situation.

> Katrina (C): When you're a woman you must be able to take responsibility.

Deborah (U): I think generally women are more nurturing and probably more empathetic, more sensitive.

Ronel (C): Being a woman is a lot of responsibility, if I can put it that way. You must just keep your head above water.

Girls were described by both groups as being "fun", "carefree", and "silly" and as not yet having the responsibility or obligations associated with womanhood. The following were descriptions of girls:

Mary (U): A girl is more silly, more fun [than a woman], and maybe has more space to experiment.

Lindy (C): A girl is dressing up ... shop 'til you drop and friends, everything that's new, newest CDs, newest everything. That's a girl.

Deborah (U): They're more experiencing the *now* ( ) are more carefree, more just child-like really ... They don't have to think about greater things like their roles or, you now, they just live in *their* world and when they're fun or they're sad they're within their world.

Hennelene (C): It's a person who is not yet so mature, or is not yet as *experienced.* A *woman* is the person who is more sensible, and in my mind a girl is a person who is not yet so very experienced and who is also not yet so strong.

Janice (U): Girl is also to me someone who has not yet experienced full responsibility that goes along with being a full-grown woman, be that responsibilities to do with like being a mother and everything that is associated with that. So I think girl has a more innocent connotation to it.

Aspects such as "fun", "spontaneous", and "carefree" were considered to fall outside the realm of womanhood or, when they did appear, were seen as the 'girl side' of a woman. As such, notions of womanhood were considered incompatible with fun and light-heartedness. In a sense, one gives these things up in becoming a woman:

> Hennelene (C): A girl is (how can I say) if I want to go to the dance now, if I want to invite my friends over or whatever, that is what girls do. A grown woman cannot do that - their responsibilities must always fit in, they are not as carefree.

> Ronel (C): A girl, can I say, you're more free than a woman, a woman must live according to what she must do, always with the family and so on. A girl can go, she can enjoy herself and come to a stop one day. But a woman's time is really limited to me ... There's definitely a difference. It's not the same anymore – you can't go and do just as you want.

As such, a major area of difference between girls and women was the responsibility and obligation that was associated with womanhood, aspects that were seen as discordant with the relative freedom of girlhood. However, besides the notions of responsibility and obligation, perhaps the most salient difference between girls and women was understood by both groups to be their difference in life experience. Obtaining life experience, often depicted as something akin to wisdom, was described as not only distinguishing between girls and women, but between women themselves. Participants often spoke of a "woman woman" or "real woman" to denote this almost archetypal idea of someone who was experienced in the ways of the world. For example:

> Lindy (C): There must have been a lot of things on her path or you must have been through a lot of things to really be like a *woman* in the true sense of the word. To be able to tell other people, especially younger people, what happened in your life, to motivate them and so on.

> Ronel (C): For me I think I still have much to *learn.* Especially now that I'm married. Compared to the things I've seen with my mother and father, I won't say I like a *woman* yet. I am a young married woman but there are still many things that I have to go through to be like a *woman*, when I can really say I'm a *woman.* I don't think I am one now ... I still have to walk that path, *then* I am a *woman.*

> Margaret (U): Like the one woman we did an interview with [for the WMHRP], she knows more about womanhood than *any* of those girls on TV or in a magazine. You know, the *pain* of having children, because for her it was a

> very painful experience, and being a *wife*, and the situations she was in, you know *that's real.*

This emphasis on the sagaciousness and multiple responsibilities associated with womanhood may reflect the so-called 'superwoman' discourse (see, for example, Macdonald, 1995) that feminists argue has been evident in the mass media in recent years. This discourse, together with the increasingly widespread notion of 'girl power', portrays young women today as supremely capable and accomplished in multiple arenas. The participants clearly adhered to notions of modern-day women being increasingly talented and successful - as Deborah (U) noted, "there's a whole package that seems to portray the ideal woman". Harris (2004) has argued that there is increasing pressure on many young women to adhere to this notion of attaining success and competence in all areas of life, which often sets unrealistically high standards which only a minority can ever attain. She notes:

> This scenario is a reality for a small number, but the image also functions as a powerful ideal that suggests that all young women are now enjoying these kinds of lives and that this is what it means to be successful. (Harris, 2004, p. 8)

Such a portrayal of modern-day young women appears to have implications for how girls become women today, in that it may 'raise the bar' for attaining womanhood. Hennelene (C), for example, who was 22 years old, did not consider herself a 'true' woman yet because:

> For me, I will call myself a woman when I can be sensible, when I can be strong, when I can tell myself 'okay' in whatever situation 'I look after myself, I will get through it because I am strong'.

Likewise, 20-year-old Katrina (C) did not see herself as a woman because:

> I cannot take on a lot yet. A woman can take on everything. Like a mother ( ) which I cannot do yet.

Waiting to be able to "take on everything" before being able to consider yourself a woman may indeed be reflective of the increasingly high standards of womanhood being portrayed today. This would suggest a mismatch between the reality of young

women's lives and the discursively-created, idealized picture of modern-day young womanhood that may result in young women not considering themselves to have obtained womanhood until these lofty criteria are met. As Mary (U) put it, she was not yet a woman because "there are still things that I need to, you know, work out and get straight". This could result in a general delay in the time that girls consider themselves to have entered womanhood.

5.2.1.2.2 Acting like a girl/woman

Differences between girls and women were furthermore emphasized through differences in behaviour. In addition to meeting the physical and emotional 'requirements' of womanhood listed above, the individual also had to behave in ways that were deemed to be womanly in order to be considered a woman. For example:

> Katrina (C): You must do things that you did not do when you were a young girl. It will be different in what you do. Like, for example, how can I say, your attitude, like if you were in the road, young girls always stand and laugh and carry on, then you must be exactly like a woman, proper and neat.
>
> Ronel (C): You do things differently to when you were a young child or girl.
>
> Janice (U): You also need to be emotionally mature enough to be labelled as a woman, obviously you can't act like a five-year-old.

On the theoretical level, the importance of looking and acting like a woman can be understood by post-modern and post-structuralist accounts, in particular by using Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) theory of performativity. The notion of 'gender as performance' or 'doing gender' was first advanced by West and Zimmerman (1987), who made the pioneering claim that gender is constituted through interaction. The idea that gender is not a property of individuals, in the sense that one does not *have* a gender, allowed for a distinctly anti-essentialist perspective of gender to emerge.

According to Butler's notion of gender performativity, gender is not an expression of what one *is*, but is something that one *does*. Gender is constituted through ongoing repetitive acts and, through this repetitiveness, is rendered 'natural' and 'real'. As such, gendered subjectivity is acquired through the repeated performance by the individual of discourses of gender (Weedon, 1999). Gender is not expressed, but

rather performed, and the performance itself produces the illusion that there exists an inner gender core.

As Butler puts it:

> If gender is something that one becomes, but can never be, then gender is itself a kind of becoming or activity, and gender ought not to be conceived as a noun or a substantial thing or a static cultural marker, but rather as an incessant and repeated action of some sort. (1990, p. 112)

Using this perspective, the distinction between girls and women can be drawn not only in terms of physical and emotional characteristics, but in terms of behaviour as well. Bearing in mind that gender is a 'stylized repetition of acts' (Butler, 1990), certain behaviours were considered to fall either within the realm of womanhood or girlhood. For example:

> Janice (U): at times like I think to myself 'what I'm doing now it doesn't fit in with being a grown woman', you know, and at times like that I feel, you know, 'you're not being grown-up now, you're not being a grown woman now' ... I see myself as a woman when I want to be one, when I need to be all like there, but I can act like a kid when I want to. I can act like both ways, well not *act* I can *be* any one of those two.

> Lindy (C): Sometimes I can, I can still go out a bit, and then I'm a girl and then most of the time I'm like a mother, 100% a mother.

From a Butlerian perspective, womanhood can be understood as acting and looking (performing) in accordance with how 'woman' has been discursively constructed to act and look in this specific cultural and historic location. Moreover, while traditional understanding suggests that the individual first feels like a woman and then acts accordingly, a Butlerian perspective allows for the possibility that the individual feels like a woman as a consequence of acting like a woman. The individual's gender performance is not necessarily done on the conscious level, and is understood as being more unconscious than deliberate. Individuals 'do woman' by aligning their appearance and behaviour to internalized discourses of womanhood. For example, Lindy's (C) earlier words of "I must probably wear grownup clothes, dress like a

grownup" in order to be seen as a woman highlights the need to 'look the part' in order to effectively 'perform woman' and thus be considered a woman.

5.2.2. Differences between groups

Although there was a large degree of overlap between the two groups' descriptions of girls and women several differences were also evident. In the Community group, women were often characterized as being role models and caretakers in the community, something which did not come up in the University group. For example,

> Katrina (C): The woman must actually be an example in the community, every woman ... I would say a woman is a role model in all things in the whole world.

> Anel (C): The girls of today they grow up quickly. But if they want to know something or so on, I've told my friends 'come and ask me, I will be willing to answer you'.

> Hennelene (C): So actually you're a pillar of strength, that's what I want to say. Other people can see you as a resource, us as women.

It appears that in the Community group notions of womanhood were more communal and more clearly aligned with ideals of strength and goodness. For example, when asked what she believed the essence of womanhood to be about, Hennelene (C) explained:

> For me being a woman is just that you have to be a caretaker of other people – your respect, your responsibility, your family, everything, everything that is good. Men have, how can I say, many of them don't have a sense of humour. Us women can always easily make a man laugh, not just a man but other people as well. If you are responsible then other people can lean on you, if you have respect then others will ( ), they will come to you for advice and so on.

This idea of connection to others in the community may be reflective of a cultural difference concerning a more collectivist or a more individualist orientation between members of the two groups, but may also be contributable to the fact that members

of this group came from a small rural community, one in which interpersonal networks were closely tied.

Another difference between the two groups was that intelligence was a salient factor in the University group's descriptions of womanhood, but was not mentioned in the Community group. For example:

> Janice (U): To me the word woman is not just restricted to someone with beautiful curves and beautiful looks and a nice body. To me the definition of a woman starts with somebody that's got something up there, so if I had to describe the word woman to someone who doesn't understand English, that's how I would start my definition.
>
> Mary (U): It's not enough anymore for a woman to be just kind of able to speak well at dinner parties or Tupperware parties, but I think its an important part of my identity to have a professional life, to be intelligent, to be valued in that way.

This difference between groups may be attributable to a class difference. Harris (2004) has argued that new modes of young femininity have been bound up with success and striving for success, particularly in the work context. The picture that is being presented particularly to middle- and upper- class young women today is one in which "educated, young, professional career women with glamorous consumer lifestyles appear to be everywhere" (Harris, 2004, p. 8). This helps explain the University group's emphasis on intelligence, as depicted through career success, given the pervasiveness of this discourse in the middle- and upper-classes. Another reason for this group difference may be the fact that the University group was composed of postgraduate students for whom academic and career success were clearly very important, given the level to which they had advanced educationally.

In conclusion, as can be seen from the results, the University and Community group both understood girlhood and womanhood to be dichotomous, and the two categories were distinguished in terms of physical and psychological variables. Participants understood there to be an intrinsic and essential difference between 'girls' and 'women', in that while they were both part of the same gender, each had a different 'nature'. The poles of this dichotomy were in opposition - psychological aspects of girlhood, such as carefreeness, were seen as incompatible with the

characteristics of womanhood. Likewise, girlhood was marked by an absence of specifically 'woman' physical traits (such as breasts and menstruation) and psychological traits (such as being responsible).

Participants' accounts of the distinction between girls and women suggest that womanhood is actively attained, in that certain physical and psychological 'criteria' had to be met, in order to be considered a 'woman'. As Johnson (1993) discusses in terms of her own study, "a female adult identity thus also required undertaking a series of tasks; it involved making a self. Adult womanhood, in this context, was an attainment rather than something young women necessarily became simply by virtue of their sex" (p. 152). In the present study, adhering to the physical and behavioural demands of femininity was considered as important as having the biological markers of womanhood and these two factors were both required in order to be labelled a 'woman'. Where they were not met, the individual was either considered to still be a 'girl', or to be less of a 'woman'.

5.3 The "woman imperative": having to become a woman

Both groups of participants felt that it was expected of them to 'become women' at this point in their lives and, as such, felt the need to become women. Participants felt pressured to enter womanhood or, more specifically, to adhere to dominant societal depictions of the physical and psychological characteristics of 'woman'. For both groups, having conflicting identities of 'girl' and 'woman' often resulted in anxiety. Participants often felt insisted upon to become more of a woman, or felt uneasy about not yet having attained womanhood as they felt that they "should" have.

For both groups, prevailing discourses on young womanhood manifested themselves through societal expectations, with participants feeling pressure at this age to change their behaviour and appearance and to take on certain roles. Many participants repeatedly referred to societal expectations during the interview. This included idealized expectations of how women "should" act and look, and also expectations of when they themselves were "supposed" to become women. The University group was particularly aware of societal demands. For example:

> Deborah (U): Myself and my best friend, we're inseparable, and we often talk about how we feel at the moment, we're both 22, that we suddenly feel so old, that we're expected to behave in a certain way, dress in certain kinds of ways … and we're very conscious of it and very aware of it, because I don't feel like

> I'm ready to behave like an adult but it's kind of *expected* and it's kind of the way we naturally are going.
>
> Margaret (U): I see myself in that in between phase, although it shouldn't be like that because as I said to you, I'm 23 years old already.
>
> Mary (U): I think that there comes a time when if you haven't, you haven't matured, you haven't made choices, that it's like a critical period. If you haven't it's kind of a problem. Because you have to grow up at some stage.

Moreover, many participants, particularly University group participants, did not feel "ready" to become women, while at the same time they felt pressured to do so:

> Mary (U): I don't know if I'm ready to be, I don't know if I'm ready to be a woman ... to take that quite serious step.
>
> Janice (U): I'm expected at this time to act my age, you know. But then, you know what I mean, there are times when you just want to do silly things and go back to the day when you still had hair with ponytails and were free and did not have to act according to other people's expectations and stuff.
>
> Deborah (U): Well that [early twenties] is when society really puts into play that now is actually the time. In adolescence there's more and more expectation of it but there's kind of some leeway too. By that sort of stage, if you've studied, the end of varsity, now you need to become fully evolved as a woman ... I kind of feel like a bit of a crisis about that, like I don't feel old enough, I don't feel ready for such big things or for the people around me to be making such big decisions [regarding marriage, career] when they're my age. So ja I think now that we've been talking about it, even though adolescence is, you know, a time of turmoil, I think the early twenties is perhaps, well I know for me, particularly difficult because that's when society really has kind of struck their threshold and it can be scary.

On the one hand, given the participants' understanding of womanhood in terms of obligation and responsibility and the high demands generally placed on modern-day women, it is perhaps not surprising that many of the participants were reluctant to fully enter womanhood. On the other hand, as Harris (2004) has proposed, middle-

and upper-class young women in particular are being actively constructed as the paragon of the late-modern individual, a situation which sets very high standards for young females from this background. For young women from privileged backgrounds issues of readiness may thus be related to individuals' uncertainty about being able to measure up to these lofty standards, and reluctance to label themselves as 'women' until they have reached these ideals.

From a Foucauldian perspective, dominant depictions of young women as successful and competent can thus be understood not just as being celebratory of young womanhood, but regulatory as well (Harris, 2004). As Harris (2004) notes, "there is a process of creation and control at work in the act of regarding young women as the winners in a new world. In holding them up as the exemplars of new possibility, we also actively construct them to perform this role" (p. 1). It may be unfortunately ironic that the ideals of success and power which first-wave feminism strove to for women may now well be a source of distress for young women whose self-esteem and sense of gendered identity are undermined when they fail to mirror the imago of the "can-do girl".

In comparison, issues of readiness to enter womanhood were by and large not raised by the Community group. As will be discussed below, given the fierce insistence in their community of the necessity to become a woman once one becomes a mother, the Community group did not have the luxury of vacillating between girlhood and womanhood, and upon having children had to become women, whether they were 'ready' or not. Interestingly, the one member of the Community group who was not a mother also raised fears of entering womanhood:

> Katrina (C): I am not ready yet to step into that role of an adult or woman ... I just want to stay a young lady. Because for me it is nice to be a young lady because to step into the women's world is *too* big. And a person doesn't know what they expect of you.

However, while the mothers in this group did not vacillate between girlhood and womanhood as such, many did express the need to become 'more' of a woman, or a 'real' woman, as discussed above. This suggests that, similarly to the ways in which young women are expected to constantly improve on their physical appearance, their was a sense that psychological variables also needed constant improvement by

gaining more experience, learning new things about themselves, others and the world, and developing the ability to constantly "handle things better" (Anel, C).

Not adhering to societal expectations created tension for the individual, such as the feeling that they were, in Janice's (U) words, "lagging behind". For example, not meeting the physical criteria of womanhood complicated the transition into womanhood, as can be seen with Janice (U) who, feeling that she was not curvaceous enough to be considered a 'woman', notes:

> so whether I saw it [becoming a woman] as a phase, yes I could say that, but then I saw it as a phase that I was and probably still am not getting through, you understand? Or, even so, that I'm doing it very slowly.

Again, the pressure that participants felt to become women can be understood in terms of the regulatory function served by discourses of 'becoming a woman'. Norms and expectations surrounding female adolescence and young womanhood (such as how one should look, how one should act, and when one should begin to do so) serve to control and restrict these seemingly natural processes. Participants' self-surveillance of whether their progress was in tune with the expectations of their communities resulted in them feeling bad about not adhering to these norms, and in anxiety over "lagging behind". However, because the notion of 'becoming a woman' is in many ways commonsensical and trivialized, its role in the regulation and containment of young women is rendered invisible. While participants were aware of the imperative to become a woman, the steps to take to get there were unclear. It was thus particularly anxiety-provoking for University group participants, who had a wider, but ill-defined, assortment of identity choices, and for whom no clear rites of passage existed to propel them into womanhood. As Rishoi (2003, p. 44) has noted, "the difficulty for individuals occurs when they seek to adhere to a unified, uncontradictory identity in the face of often contradictory discourses".

Having established that the participants all believed in real differences between girls and women (in that they were two qualitatively different states of being female) and that participants felt a need to 'become' a woman, the question becomes, 'how does the individual go from being a girl to being a woman?' Unlike many other socially constructed dichotomies (such as man/woman), the girl/woman dichotomy is one that all females are expected to cross at a certain point. The ways in which individuals negotiate this transition will now be discussed.

5.4 Identities under construction: different processes experienced

In this category, the different nature of the process of 'becoming a woman' experienced by the two groups and the different forms that their gender identities took, will be compared.

5.4.1 Continuum versus discrete stages

All of the participants described the transition into womanhood as a process. This process was seen as entailing different phases and as taking time, with individual variation believed to occur as to when the transition takes place. For all participants the transition into womanhood was considered intertwined with the process of becoming an adult, or 'growing up'. For both groups the process involved becoming stronger, finding oneself and generally obtaining life experience. As Hennelene (C) notes:

> Because it is probably just part of a process of girl to woman because in this stage you just become stronger, you gain more experience and you build yourself. You're still a woman, but you build yourself from a girl to a woman and then, over the years, and with time, you learn from your mistakes and then you become stronger.

Participants' accounts of the transition into womanhood as a largely natural and universal process reflect what Lesko (2001) has called the "ideology of emergence" (p. 3), in which teenagers are seen as naturally emerging from childhood, outside of social influences, and which depicts adolescence as a powerful and uncontrollable force.

The transition from girlhood to womanhood was understood by both groups as involving a physical and a psychological component. The physical transition involved menstruation (menarche) and the development of "curves", in particular breasts. Again, it involved looking like a woman, a factor identified by virtually all the participants as being very important. The psychological transition involved cognitive, emotional and behavioural changes. Examples include the notions of maturity, being responsible, thinking differently (for example taking others' perspectives into account, 'seeing the big picture'), gaining life experience and generally "growing up". By and large it involved thinking and acting like a woman.

However, while all of the participants agreed that the transition was a process, there were important differences in terms of how and when this process was understood to occur. The two groups of participants differed as to whether they saw the transition into womanhood to occur along a continuum, or according to discrete stages. First, the mechanics of the process were understood differently, namely whether the transition was understood to involve specific rites of passage, or whether it was a vague process that occurred along a continuum. Second, the age and life stages at which the transition was believed to occur differed. Differences between the two groups will be discussed in turn.

5.4.1.1 The University group – the transition into womanhood as occurring along a continuum

The University group understood the transition into womanhood to occur along a continuum and did not identify with any clear rites of passage that ushered the individual into womanhood. Participants differed as to when they believed an individual 'becomes a woman'. There was a ten-year difference in the accounts - some thought it occurred during puberty, some that it occurred during adolescence, some that it occurred during early adulthood. Participants were ambiguous about when a girl 'becomes' a woman:

> Margaret (U): There's no age, there's no age. You can't say 'when you're 21 you're a woman'. It's a lot of different places for people. I think it's not physical, it's not physical, it's not a physical age, I think it's an emotional age, and intellectual, ja, more emotional and intellectual.

> Mary (U): I don't think it happens overnight, and also it's difficult, as you heard, it's very difficult to pinpoint the exact moment when it happens, so I definitely think it's a process of I guess getting to know yourself.

However, in terms of their own personal experience, participants felt that one 'became' a woman during one's early twenties. As Deborah (U) put it:

> the early twenties seems to be really a definite process of actively becoming an adult or woman ... I suppose in your early twenties you mostly let go of being a girl, of being a child, but that element of that is still maintained within you ... I don't think in my mind I have like a set age but I suppose by like 20-odd you need to like start, I don't know, you need to start acting differently.

> Mary (U): I think I became more of a woman at university, so like 19, 20, 21, you should be a woman by 23, 24.

The transition into womanhood was understood to involve a gradual shift over time, in which one was in a "stage of in betwixt" (Deborah, U) and in which the individual has elements of both girl and woman. It was portrayed as a time when "you hang around with different bits and pieces" (Mary, U). As Margaret (U) describes:

> Every time you deal with a situation in a more woman than a girl way that, you know, brings you closer to the womanness than the girlness.

As the transition was believed to occur along a continuum, there was no clear distinction in terms of when the girl 'crossed over' into womanhood. Many participants in the University group mentioned that the process does not "occur overnight", in that there were no specific rites of passage with which the University group participants identified. As, Margaret (U) notes:

> I think they [society] they look at it [becoming a woman] as an *age*. I remember when I turned 21, like all the family and everyone calls and 'ooh, you're a woman now' or when, when you have your period for the first time. I mean a lot of people refer to *that* as being a woman. Or the first time you sleep with someone and that's *not*, according to me, that's not, it doesn't make any difference to you being a girl or a woman. It's an internal thing, it's a way of looking at life, it's not where you are in life ... You can be a girl and have woman aspects, but not be a woman yet. I think when you turn into a woman ... the woman aspects dominate the girl aspects, they're just more. The girl is always going to be there, I think, but the woman aspects just dominate.

In contradiction to their accounts of girls and women as dichotomous entities, when asked how they believed girls became women all of the participants in this group argued that girlhood was an integral part of womanhood, in that one "never stops being a girl". The distinction between girls and women during the transition became blurred, and girlhood and womanhood were therefore paradoxically no longer seen to be discrete entities. For the University group, an individual could be both girl and woman at the same time. For example:

Mary (U): I think there's a girl in everyone always. I think it would be quite sad if there wasn't. To me the girl is the one that's like fun and naughty and, you know, makes rude jokes, that kind of thing. And I think it would be really sad to become stale and serious. It'll be the equivalent of dying in a way, you know? ... I think that as long as you can have fun or you can imagine and dream, and its an important part of your life, then I think you've still got some girl left in you ... I think that the little girl in me will always be there, I can't imagine my life without her.

Deborah (U): I suppose by your early twenties you mostly let go of being a girl, of being a child, but that element of that still is maintained within you.

Margaret (U): I don't think you get to a stage when you can say the girl is gone and the woman is left ... I know my girl part will never fade away. I know it ... I think the girl in me will always make an appearance. Probably less in the future, but I think she'll always pop up just to say hi.

Angela (U): I have to accept being part child and part adult at times.

Janice (U): I think it's an integral part of every woman. You don't have to stop being a girl, you just put it away in the closet and take it out every now and again, you know.

The University group's belief in the continuation of girlhood into womanhood highlighted the tenuous nature of the girl/woman dichotomy. Even though the participants started the interview with a clear distinction between girlhood and womanhood, the boundaries between girl and woman became unclear when discussing how girls 'become' women. As such, there was often a disparity between what participants 'knew' (that girls and women were qualitatively different) and what they had experienced (that girlhood and womanhood were often enmeshed). In other words, for the University group participants, the psychological aspects of girlhood were in many ways believed to continue into womanhood. As these 'girl' aspects could not be incorporated into participants' images of womanhood, they believed in the continuation of girlhood alongside womanhood, rather than a complete transformation from 'girl' into 'woman'. University group participants believed in the possibility of being both 'girl' and 'woman' at the same time.

5.4.1.2 The Community group - the transition into womanhood as involving discrete stages

In contrast to the University group, the Community group saw less overlap between girlhood and womanhood and the phases in the transition were more clearly delineated for these participants. Whereas the University group largely understood the process as the transition between two phases (girl and woman), for Community group participants the process involved an additional phase - the Community group differentiated between girl ("meisie"), young girl ("jong meisie") or young lady ("jong dame"), and woman ("vrou"). A 'girl' was a young female child, one who had not yet started menstruating. Upon menarche the individual becomes a 'young girl' until the age of around 18 when she becomes a 'young lady' (the distinction was not always drawn between 'young girl' and 'young lady', with many from the Community group referring only to 'young girl'). For this group, womanhood is formally reached through two routes – by turning 21 years old or, if before the age of 21, by becoming a mother. Specific rites of passage in the form of menarche, turning 21 years old, and becoming a mother thus clearly separated the different female life stages. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

a) Menarche

In the Community group menarche was a clear rite of passage in female development. Unlike much of the Western discourse, however, it was not understood as making the individual a woman, but as making her a "jong meisie". However, menstruation was considered an integral step on the road to eventually becoming a woman, and an individual would not be considered a woman if she was not yet menstruating. As Katrina (C) illustrates:

> I have a cousin who's like that - she's never got it [menarche] and she's 21. For me it's important because then you become, as they say, a young girl. You must have that. Because she feels very out because (she doesn't have it yet). She also just wants to get her menstruation. She believes you must have that to be able to be a young girl. She also says that she has not yet reached her young girl stage. So it's very important here by us.

University group participants, on the other hand, did not consider menarche to be a significant developmental event. For example:

> Mary (U): It just happened. I was really young and I was definitely not a woman. My body did it ... I guess you're like told that you're becoming a woman when you get your first period, but I was like eleven or ten or something, so I definitely wasn't a woman then.

> Angela (U): I think ours [transition into womanhood] was previously marked as girls menstruating and then they became a woman. I don't really see that as a change.

> Margaret (U): It's a physical change, it doesn't have to mean *anything* emotionally.

b) Turning 21 years old

The 21st birthday was a significant event in the Community group, and formally signified the entrance into adulthood and womanhood for those who had not yet had a child. The 21st birthday is celebrated publicly by throwing a large and formal party. As Katrina (C) explains:

> They always taught me that when I get sick [menstruate] I am a young girl, but when I turn 21, then you're an adult ... Because 21 is very big here ( ) it's a young lady who is now going to become a woman, is going to be in the women's world ... There's two reasons why it's 21, if you turn 21 and you don't have a baby you are still a woman, because you're 21. And if you're 21 and older, then you're an adult because then, as they say at all the twenty-firsts, then you have your own responsibilities, you step into the grown up world ... As they say, if you are 21 then you unlock the door to being a woman, being responsible.

The role of the 21st birthday may be considered a rite of passage within the coloured community at large, as the coloured participant in the University group also spoke of its importance:

> You know in most coloured communities these days if someone becomes 21, especially a girl, there's this whole like manoeuvre, you know. They hire a hall and there are people that come and there's this whole speech type of thing and they cater the whole business. It's not like that for everybody but I think compared to white people it's mainly done in coloured society.

This can be contrasted with the views of the white participants, where, although they recognized the discourse of the 21st birthday as being important, not one of them personally considered turning 21 to be a significant developmental event. For instance:

> Deborah (U): Are you just at midnight like supposed to turn into an adult, you know, I don't really think its works like that.
>
> Margaret (U): Being 21 is obviously an age when the world looks at you as a grown up so the chances that you are going to look at yourself in a grown up way, the chances are good of that happening. I didn't look at myself in a different way at all, but I might be, you know, kind of an exception.
>
> Mary (U): I think it's an excuse for rich people to make their parents (buy them expensive gifts).

Turning 21 was therefore an important rite for the coloured participants, but held much less significance for white participants. Given the importance bestowed upon this event in their community, it is unsurprising that this event would be a salient developmental milestone in the Community group.

c) Motherhood

Whereas the University group did not concur with notions of menarche and turning 21 being significant, for both groups motherhood was considered a defining feature of womanhood. Motherhood was described by many as the ultimate fulfilment of womanhood, and becoming a mother was often understood to confer automatic status as a woman:

> Katrina (C): if you have a baby then you are a woman ... because if you have a baby then you must be classified as a grown woman because it is only grown women who have babies ... A mother will have to be a grown woman. Everything must be right. That's what you expect from a grown woman.
>
> Margaret (U): becoming a mother brings you very much in touch with what womanhood entails. Taking responsibility for a baby, loving it, caring for it, it

can get you there very very quickly it can be, you know, the last phase of becoming a woman.

Angela (U): I always think that maybe when I have children I'll grow up or something.

Deborah (U): I think a large part of it [womanhood] is, if you're old enough, being a mother ... *that* for me is like the ultimate thing of womanhood ... for me I look very much forward to having children and I do see myself feeling more like a woman then.

Mary (U): I think that ( ) people still see motherhood as like the ultimate, the central role, as being the most important.

Anel (C): When I was thirteen or fourteen I used to think: "21 is when I'll become a woman". But it's not really like that, that how circumstances work out. Like for example with me – I am now nineteen and a baby came and now I feel like a woman.

In the Community group there was significant pressure for mothers to act as women rather than as "jong meisies" and the participants who were mothers did largely perceive themselves as women, as the follow quotes from mothers show:

Anel (C): When I had my child, my baby, I was still so, how can I say, I had childishness in me. I just wanted to play. Then she [her mother] said to me 'no, that isn't right', I now have a baby and I must now behave like a mother and I must now leave the childishness and afterwards I said 'okay, I know I am a mother now and I must behave like a mother ... I am now 19, now I act like a woman. It *must* happen like that because otherwise what does it help me if I was to act like a girl?

Katrina (C): Your behaviour must change, you can't be loud anymore, you must be like a woman ( ). Because people are then going to say 'she has a child now and look where she's sitting' ... But then you get some that are already mothers that still want to be young girls. And that's not right. Because it doesn't help if you're a woman and you're a young girl, because how is that going to help you?

> Lindy (C): I am a mother now and I must now think like a mother and I must now react like a mother.

For both groups there was a strong sense that girlhood needed to be left behind when one became a mother. Neither group permitted the idea of girlhood and motherhood co-occurring - as Katrina (C) notes, at this point "you must choose if you want to be woman or young girl". This is understandable given that the characteristics that the participants associated with girlhood, such as being carefree and irresponsible, are antithetical to what motherhood is represented to entail within dominant discourses. As such, there was strong pressure for the teenage mother to reject all that girlhood entails and embrace all that womanhood entails. Many of the teenage mothers described the swift change in social status following their transition into motherhood/ womanhood, for instance:

> Lindy (C): As soon as you're a mother, as soon as you maybe have a responsibility, then you no longer have those friends that you once had. The people will say, say now your peer group, your age group, they'll say 'no, you're big now, you can't fit in with us anymore. You can't fit in with us anymore. So every weekend we can party and we can go out, but you can't, you must sit with your baby on weekends'.

Within the Community group, turning 21 without being a mother was considered the socially desirable way of 'becoming a woman'. Those who followed this path into womanhood were seen as role-models for younger girls and as examples of female virtue. The second route to womanhood, and one that was considered less moral and severely frowned upon in the community, was through teenage pregnancy, when the individual had a child before her 21st birthday. Within the Community group, by having a baby one necessarily 'becomes a woman', regardless of age. Those who have a child before they turn 21 are not allowed to celebrate their 21st birthday in the same auspicious manner as those who have not yet had a child. As the participants who had children explained:

> Lindy (C): Here in this community it is like that. You must, if you are 21 and you want a 21st birthday, say now in a hall, then you are not allowed to have children, you must be clean, you must be a virgin ... 21 without a baby *then* it's important ... Because if I did not have him [son] then I would have hired a

> hall and catered and such things, had a dress made. But I cannot, I've already had my 21st.
>
> Anel (C): No, I'm not going to have a party, as they say, a braai, that's all ... Well, it feels to me I don't want to become 21. Because I've already made a flop of it, if I can say ... because my 21st has already come, it seems to me.

Individuals from the community incorporated these ideas on the daily level and behaved according to them. As with motherhood, the individual's social status changed after their 21st birthday. In describing her friends who have had their 21st, Katrina (C), who had not yet turned 21 and who was not a mother, noted:

> They are different. They don't click with you anymore. Is almost like they just want to operate with the grownups, like we say, walk with the grownups. Then they'll really (chuck) you off. Like a friend of mine who's like that, she says 'I can't talk to you because you are children and I'm big now, a grownup'. And I tell her I'm not interested, I wait my time, I'll also get there, become a grownup, become adult.

The presence of certain salient rites of passage may be characteristic of the coloured community in general, as a coloured member of the University group also understood the transition into womanhood to occur as a result of a specific rite of passage. In her case, however, the rite of passage was menarche:

> The moment you start menstruating and stuff like that, now you're labelled as a woman ... I think at that point exactly where somebody starts menstruating and, obviously it doesn't happen in a day's time, but around puberty, when you grow emotionally, your body changes and all those changes that are occurring in and around you. That's about the time when you really go over, step over ... You see for me I think the biggest distinction between a girl and a woman is that you get your periods and you start literally becoming a woman.

Therefore, the nature of the transition into womanhood was understood differently by the different cultural groups – the white participants spoke of a gradual progression along a continuum (a gradual physical, psychological and social shift from the one end, girl, to the other, woman), whilst coloured participants saw a definite rite of

passage in the form of menarche, turning 21, or becoming a mother. Community group participants did not allow for the coexistence of girlhood and womanhood, as University group participants did, and rejected the idea of being able to be both girl and woman. Motherhood was the factor most unambiguously connected to womanhood, as both groups considered all mothers to be women. Again however, there was incongruity between what the participants 'knew' and what they themselves had experienced. Most notably, while Community group members had often completed all of the 'official' steps to becoming a woman (such as turning 21, being a mother), there was often still ambiguity regarding the degree to which they saw themselves as a 'real woman', as discussed below.

On the theoretical level, such differences between groups may be explained in terms of the different context-specific discourses that construct different truths and knowledges about what the transition into womanhood entails. Participants from the two groups internalized these "systems of reasoning" (Lesko, 2001, p. 8) and experienced the process of 'becoming a woman' according to them.

Having determined how the transitional process is experienced, a social constructionist analysis allows for the examination of the reasons for why these differences may exist. It was noted that, with the exception of motherhood, white participants' did not endorse any events as important developmental milestones in female development, including menarche and turning 21, which were seen as significant to coloured participants. In this respect the English and Afrikaans culture of the white participants may merely be reflective of the broader Western zeitgeist in which formal rites of passage are no longer the norm. Such rites of passage may have fallen away in the face of ideas about choice and freedom becoming central to contemporary notions of individuality (Harris, 2004). In the current late-modern era, "individuals are expected to be flexible, adaptable, resilient ... one's own life becomes a personal project much like a do-it-yourself assemblage" (Harris, 2004, p. 8). These notions of indeterminacy and fluidity may work against rigid and formal rites of passage.

The interconnection of class and culture resulted in different social contexts that differentially shaped the ways in which the transition into womanhood was subjectively experienced. This fact highlights the social nature of this transition and, as such, it is not purely a 'natural' process, but one that is deeply ingrained with specific discourses and 'truths' that are dominant in a culture. In a similar vein, the

'girl'/'woman' distinction is not immutable, stable, a-historical, or pre-discursive, but is social and context-specific.

5.4.2 Fluid identity versus fixed identity

There were many differences in whether the participants perceived themselves as 'girls', 'women' or 'young girls' ("jong meisies"). There were thus differences between the two groups in terms of the degree of mutability present in the participants' identities. Identities in the University group were more fluid, while identities in the Community group were more fixed. Since identity is always changing and constantly being shaped by discourses, by "fixed" it is not meant that Community group participants' identities were absolute, but rather that they had formed clearer and more crystallized gendered identities when compared to the University group. Differences between the two groups in terms of gendered identity formation will now be discussed.

5.4.2.1 The University group – the construction of fluid identities

University group participants had difficulty in identifying themselves unequivocally as a girl or as a woman. They often perceived themselves to be neither girl nor woman, and in all cases described themselves as being "in between" girlhood and womanhood. Most often they had, in Rishoi's words, a "hybrid identity" (2003, p. 133), in that they say themselves as having elements of both girl and woman. For example, when asked if they saw themselves as a girl or as a woman, University group participants replied:

> Deborah (U): A woman with part girl. I think I'd definitely say that I see myself more as a woman, but that I definitely have elements of being a child and being a girl inside me.
>
> Margaret (U): I don't think I really look at myself as being a woman yet ... I think it's got to be 51/49 for the woman. I think the woman emerged now, she's in control but the girl is still there, to a big extent she's still there.
>
> Janice (U): I think at times I still don't know what I am.
>
> Mary (U): I still sometimes think I'm a girl ... I think that I'm more on the woman side of the continuum, way more than, you know, before.

This can be understood in light of Weedon's (1999) argument that in post-modernity, subjectivity is often understood as "an effect of culture which produces not unified identity, but a subjectivity which is fragmented, contradictory, and which comprises multiple identities" (p. 3). In this way, the individual could, for example, be a girl "with a touch of woman here and there" (Mary, U). In a similar vein, Budgeon (2003) has contended that the changes that feminism brought about in the social order in recent decades have resulted in young women having more identity choices available to them compared to previous generations. As Angela (U) stated: "I don't have to fit in one category".

5.4.2.2 The Community group – the construction of fixed identities

When compared to the University group, the Community group participants were more certain of their identity, and generally described themselves as either a woman ("vrou") or a young girl ("jong meisie"), not as having elements of both. Community group members gave more definitive answers about their identity. When asked if they saw themselves as a girl or as a woman, these participants replied, for example:

> Lindy (C): A woman.
>
> Katrina (C): A young lady. I would say a young lady. I don't have a baby. Okay, I am sexually active but that happens all the time that young girls are sexually active ... I say young girl because I have not yet reached that age that I can be a woman.
>
> Hennelene (C): I see myself as a woman.
>
> Ronel (C): As a young woman. I'll say as a young woman.
>
> Anel (C): A woman.

All of the participants who were mothers said that they saw themselves as a woman, again suggesting the importance of motherhood in the identity processes of the participants. However, ambiguity and contradiction did surround their accounts of themselves as 'young ladies' or 'women'. Rather than vacillating between the identity of 'girl' or 'woman', however, Community group participants were more likely to distinguish between themselves as a young woman and as a 'real woman'. As discussed above, this notion of a 'real woman' or 'woman woman' entails the idea of

life experience and lessons learned, of having "walked the path", as Lindy (C) put it, of womanhood. Moreover, it was often the case that the participants from both groups would refer to themselves alternately as girls and women throughout the interview. Angela (U), for instance, states "I feel more like a girl" in one part of the interview, and then "I don't feel like a girl anymore" in another, highlighting the ambiguous and multiple gendered identities that appear to be present in young women of this age. As Charles (1996) has argued, "not only do women differ from each other, but women's identities are themselves fragmented, many of their identities conflicting" (p. 9).

While post-modern and post-structuralist theorists contend that increased identity choices are now available to young women, the extent to which this is true for all groups of women is debatable. Perhaps the possibility of multiple identities is only available to those in more privileged social positions, such as the mainly middle- and upper-class white participants in the University group. The University group, given their privileged position, were in a sense more free from the constraints of ascribed identities, while the Community group's identities were more fixed and a smaller array of identity options was available to these young women. Another difference may be that upon becoming mothers and regardless of their age, womanhood status was bestowed upon Community group members and they were actively labelled as women by their community. When compared to the University group participants who had delayed motherhood and who thus had to carve out a label for themselves, it is understandable why the University group were in general less certain of their status as either a 'girl' or a 'woman'.

Moreover, using the Foucauldian notion that subjectivity is the effect of discourse (Weedon, 1999), results suggest that members of the Community group were more certain of their identity because discourses available to them more clearly demarcated the boundaries between girlhood and womanhood. There were clear rites of passage and clearly delineated phases through which the individual progressed and these were practiced within the community on an everyday level. On the other hand, University group members, with the exception of motherhood, had no discourses that were so unambiguous about the transition into womanhood, leaving the process vague and indistinct. The transition into womanhood was much less concrete for them and was not practically addressed in their communities. As a result, they were much less certain of their identity as either a 'girl' or a 'woman'.

More generally, the differences in the Community and University group's experiences of the transition into womanhood can also be explained by what Connell (cited in Williams, 2002) has referred to as 'gender regimes', a construct which "provides a framework to identify gender meanings that are attached to specific locations" (Williams, 2002, p. 32). As Williams (2002) has argued, one may fruitfully use place, or community, to specify how a local gender regime shapes the transition into womanhood. The gender relations subsumed under a specific gender regime are influenced by a community's socio-economic class, culture, values, and beliefs. Gender regimes in turn shape the experiences of adolescent girls and young women in the ways that they negotiate the entrance into womanhood and eventually adopt local gender regimes (Williams, 2002). The communities from which the University and Community groups came could thus be argued to each possess its own 'gender regime'. In the Community group, the gender regime involved clear demarcations between the different stages of development, particularly in terms of menarche and turning 21. These rites of passage were absent in the communities of the University group, which was instead organized more diffusely. This had an impact on the participants' identity constructions, in that while more identity options were available to the relatively privileged University group, this blurring of precut roles also resulted in a sense of gendered identity that was vicissitudinous at best.

The ways in which their identities were being constructed (as more fluid or more fixed) had implications for the psychological well-being of the participants. Those from the University group in general found the transition into womanhood harder than those from the Community group. Participants from the University group were much more likely to raise issues concerning their readiness to enter womanhood, their feeling of being pressured by expectations regarding how and when they "should" 'become a woman', and their fears concerning not making the transition successfully (such as by "lagging behind").

As discussed above, one reason for the University group experiencing more anxiety during the transition into womanhood may be the lack of clear rites of passage in their culture. This is with the notable exception of motherhood, but, given that motherhood is increasingly being delayed in this cultural and class group, it no longer serves to usher the individual into womanhood during her early twenties. This lack of a formal rite of passage in turn resulted in individuals being unsure as to when and how they were supposed to cross over into womanhood. Such uncertainty may contribute to participants' anxiety during this period. On a broader level, the problem

may be trying to have a unified identity as a 'woman' in the face of contradictory discourses. Given that the role of young womanhood is currently in a state of flux as a result of a wide scale transformation of gender roles since the women's movement, a melange of discourses exists on what it means to be a young woman in this day and age (Harris, 2004). This is evident when considering the general societal ambiguity surrounding the use of the terms 'girl' and 'woman' today. Since language is moulded by discourses, ambiguity of signifiers may reflect ambiguity of discourses. For example, the same female may be referred to as a 'girl' or as a 'woman' in the same context without any semantic oddity and the word 'adult' does not adequately distinguish the meanings of 'girl' and 'woman' because the term 'girl' is often applied to adult females (Romaine, 1999). Linguist John Lyons (quoted in Romaine, 1999) remarks:

> By any of the most obvious criteria (sexual maturity, etc.) girls reach what would normally be described as adulthood earlier, rather than later than, boys; and yet they are described as girls for far longer than boys are described as boys. The proposition "X is now a man" may well imply "X is no longer a boy"; but "X is now a woman" does not imply "X is no longer a girl" (p. 135)

As such, the University group participants' transition was complicated by the fact that they were undergoing this process during a time in which ideas about what it means to be a young woman were being reinvented on the macro level. It can be argued that consequences of the feminist movement have been most directly or concretely felt by middle- and upper-class women, rather than the working class, where gender roles have remained more closely aligned with their traditional features. The widespread delay of marriage and motherhood in more affluent classes has altered the transition into womanhood by shifting these two traditional markers of womanhood to a later age than was the case for previous generations. Because delaying motherhood was not yet as entrenched within the Community group, the role of motherhood as a rite of passage for young women remained active and salient within that community. Moreover, shielded in a university setting, the participants in the University group had not yet faced the demands of motherhood or having to enter the job market as their counterparts in the Community group had, factors which may well have contributed significantly to feelings of being a 'woman'.

5.5 Conclusion

In summary, when looking at the three categories constructed from the data (the girl/woman dichotomy, the "woman imperative", and the different processes experienced) certain similarities and differences are evident between the two groups of participants. In terms of similarities, members of both groups believed that girlhood and womanhood were dichotomous, in that salient physical (body shape, menstruation, feminine appearance) and psychological (cognitions, emotions, behaviour) differences were believed to exist between girls and women. For both groups, however, these differences became blurred when discussing themselves or members of their age group (early twenties). The notion of a "woman imperative" was also present in both groups of participants, with both groups discussing societal expectations of when and how the transition into womanhood should occur. Both groups felt under pressure to 'become women' at this point in their lives, and those who felt that they were somehow unsuccessful at this experienced anxiety. A notable similarity in University group and Community group accounts of the nature of the transition was the importance of motherhood, which was described by both groups to be the epitome of womanhood and something that automatically granted the individual status as a 'woman'.

In terms of differences between the two groups, three broad types of differences can be identified, namely differences in context (what they believed womanhood to entail), differences in process (how the participants understood the transition to occur), and differences in the fluidity or form which characterized their identities as 'girls', 'women', or both. Firstly, the University group's accounts of womanhood centred far more on the importance of career success and intelligence, while the Community group's accounts emphasized the communal and interpersonal nature of a woman's role within the community to a greater extent. Secondly, clearer rites of passage (menarche, turning 21) existed in the Community group, whereas University group participants did not identify as much with the importance of these developmental milestones. It appears that the salience of these events may be culturally determined, as the coloured participant in the University group also identified with menarche as being a rite of passage to womanhood. Thirdly, as a result there were differences in the ways in which the two groups of participants had constructed their identities as girls or women. Community group participants were clearer of their position in the developmental sequence of events. Together with the fact that most of the members of this group had entered motherhood, participants from the Community group had a more fixed identity. By comparison, due to the more nebulous nature of the transitional process in the University group, these

participants' identity was more fluid, in that they vacillated between an identity as a girl or as a woman, and allowed for the possibility of being both.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary of findings

The notion of 'becoming a woman' has a wide currency in the psychological literature, and is a prevalent one in modern society, yet is one on which little empirical work has been done. Falling within the realm of developmental psychology, this process can be understood from either a traditional, modernist perspective, or a post-modern, social constructionist perspective.

A modernist approach to the transition into womanhood is more clearly hegemonic, with the process usually considered to occur according to inner laws of development and as largely independent of social processes. On the other hand, a post-modern, social constructionist approach to understanding the process of 'becoming a woman' attempts to steer clear of the essentialism of traditional, taken-for-granted understandings, in that modernist perspectives often depict this process as an innate, biological transition from the essentialized 'girl' into the essentialized 'woman'. Instead, a social constructionist perspective on the transition into womanhood makes visible the social and contextualized nature of the process and highlights the importance of culture and discourses in understandings of what 'becoming a woman' entails. Moreover, post-modernism and post-structuralism allow us to examine "the shifting, fragmented, highly contextualized and constructed complexity of meaning, power and the self" (Beasley, 1999, p. 92).

The purpose of the present study was to explore how young South African women from different social contexts themselves understand and subjectively experience the transition into womanhood. It aimed to examine the ways in which the participants construct and negotiate their identities as women. More specifically, this study aimed to 1) investigate whether the distinction between girlhood and womanhood was significant, 2) determine whether the transition into womanhood was an important one for young women, and 3) document how these young women subjectively experience the transition. The findings of this study can perhaps best be summarized in terms of these three subquestions.

6.1.1 The distinction between girlhood and womanhood

At the most basic level this study aimed to determine whether participants distinguished between girlhood and womanhood. It was found that participants

generally understood the constructs 'girl' and 'woman' to be discrete entities marked by physical and psychological differences. A combination of physical markers (such as breasts, menstruation and looking feminine) and psychological markers (such as acting like a woman) were required to consider someone a woman. The symbolic boundary between girlhood and womanhood was thus not simply demarcated by signs of physical maturity, but by a combination of various signs of physical and psychological maturation. The fact that participants felt that an individual could be more or less of a woman (for example someone being a 'real woman' or a 'woman woman') suggests that the transitional process is more complex than, for example, becoming a woman merely by experiencing menarche.

A post-modern, social constructionist perspective stresses the role of discourse in constructing the 'truths' about what a 'woman' is. From the participants' accounts, the ways in which discursive practices shape bodies, emotions and behaviour in socially gendered ways is clear - participants aimed to materially transform their bodies and mould their emotions and behaviour to conform to dominant notions of femininity. Moreover, using a Foucauldian understanding of power, participants aimed to actively turn themselves into particular kinds of subjects, subjects that adhered to dominant (and thus powerful) discourses of womanhood through self-policing behaviour and self-regulation to norms. In this way the body becomes a site for operations of power, in that the female body, much more than the male body, is considered to need constant up-keep and improvement. In a similar vein, feminist understandings of dominant depictions of womanhood and femininity highlight the ways on which these depictions serve to oppress women (for example by creating anxiety amongst those who don't conform to these depictions) and their role in maintaining the status quo of women's subordination to men.

Another post-structuralist theory, Butler's notion of gender performativity, can be used to understand the importance of acting like a woman to be considered a woman. From this perspective, the participants in this study were either 'doing girlhood' or 'doing womanhood' or, in cases where they felt they were "in betwixt", they were doing elements of both. In Butler's terms, the extent to which participants saw themselves as women may be linked to the extent to which they 'perform woman' according to the expectations of the social contexts they found themselves in.

6.1.2 The significance of the transition

It was important to determine whether the transition into womanhood was a significant process in the psychological life of females. The University group in particular saw themselves as being currently involved in this transition (for example by saying that they were in the 'in between phase') and expressed a keen awareness of societal expectations surrounding the transition into womanhood, as well as a concomitant sense of anxiety of not living up to these expectations. The transition into womanhood thus reverberated on the emotional level, with participants often subjectively experiencing a sense that it was imperative to somehow 'become a woman' at this point in their lives. This 'woman imperative', as well as the dictates of femininity internalized by the participants, can again be understood in terms of power dynamics, in that these ideals were strived for through self-regulation and self-policing to societal norms and expectations.

6.1.3 How the transition was subjectively experienced

This study aimed to document how participants subjectively experienced the transition into womanhood. Contextual differences in how the participants experienced the transition were found, as is apparent in the many different ways in which this process was understood. The nature of the transitional process (whether it was understood to occur gradually along a continuum, or whether there were clear rites of passage involved) was experienced differently by the two groups, and the forms of the participants' identities (whether identities were more fluid or fixed) also showed variability.

From a social constructionist perspective, participants' identities were constructed according to context-specific discourses surrounding girlhood and womanhood. Given both their privileged position and the fact that they were not mothers, University group members had greater leeway in constructing their identities. However, the implication of these different identity constructions was that the transition was harder for the University group, as these participants struggled with issues of readiness to enter womanhood and concerns about not meeting expectations of how and when they "should" 'become' women. This can be explained by the particularly high standards of young womanhood that prevail in present-day middle- and upper- classes, which may cause young women to feel as if they cannot consider themselves as 'women' until these standards are attained. Similarly, delayed motherhood, which has become the norm within this socio-economic bracket, prevents young women from undergoing this potentially significant

rite of passage (motherhood was the only developmental event considered by the University group to be an unequivocal marker of womanhood).

Perhaps the main conclusion that can be reached from the present study is the complexity of the transition into womanhood. From the theoretical lens used in the present study, 'becoming a woman' can be seen as an intricate process in which an interplay of biological and social or contextual factors influence how the individual sees herself in terms of gendered identity. From a social constructionist perspective, the transition into womanhood is not a purely biological or natural process, but is a negotiation of different discourses and identity choices available to participants in different social contexts. In certain circumstances, as with the relatively privileged participants in the University group, there is the possibility of multiple, fluid identities existing at the same time. In other social circumstances, such as with the mothers in the Community group, a more fixed and narrow range of acceptable identity choices are available. One could argue that should the process of 'becoming a woman' be only innate and natural, as dominant discourses often claim, such wide variability in patterns of understandings and experiences of the process would not exist.

6.2 Implications for theory and praxis

6.2.1 Implications for theory

With regard to the three central concepts inherent in this study (development, identity, and gender), the results clearly underscore their intricate social, and not just physical, nature and the ways in which they are discursively produced. Development, for example, was not simply the maturational unfolding of 'inner laws of development', but differed according to the participants' social context. Similarly, participants' identity constructions were influenced by their class and culture and, as such, we can agree with Charles' assertion that "identity formation is bound up with culture, different cultures or subcultures with different identities" (1996, p. 4). Like identity, gender was discursively produced, in that differences between groups as to how issues of identity and gender were constructed resulted from different discourses operating in the two contexts. Furthermore, issues of power were embedded in processes of development, identity and gender - mechanisms of power discursively regulated the 'truth' and 'knowledge' which participants adhered to concerning these three constructs, and created a need in the participants to conform to these dominant discourses, creating stress and anxiety for those participants that did not conform. Overall, differences between the two groups in terms of these three factors highlights their contextualized nature, and again it could be argued that were

these constructs universally independent of social forces, patterns in developmental processes, identity negotiations, and gender constructs in similar class, cultural and racial groups would not emerge.

The results of the present study challenge traditional mainstream and traditional feminist accounts of female development along three fronts. Firstly, the location of the transition into womanhood in the female life cycle was found to be different to that suggested in the literature. Results suggest that while the participants recognized discourses which assert that the transition into womanhood occurs during early adolescence, they themselves understood the transition into womanhood to occur in the late teens and early twenties, with womanhood often believed to be fully attained by the mid twenties. This is significant because this age period is much later than the literature would suggest - most current theoretical and empirical work on 'becoming a woman' concentrates on the early teen years (see, for example, Gilligan, 1990; Oinas, 2001; Williams, 2002).

Secondly, the results challenge hegemonic theories' essentialist accounts of the transition into womanhood. If female development did simply occur according to inner laws of development, as most hegemonic theories claim, then the same pattern of development would be evident in both groups. That is, if 'becoming a woman' was purely innate and natural, the process would be universally similar, as is the case with normal human physical development. However, as the results show, in just the two groups investigated there was great variability in beliefs about how the transition into womanhood occurred. Context was thus a central factor in determining what 'becoming a woman' was believed to entail.

Thirdly, two processes widely depicted in the literature as making a female a 'woman', namely menarche and losing one's virginity, were by and large not supported in the participants' accounts of their own transition. For example, with regards to losing one's virginity, Margaret (U) noted:

> You know it's a grown up thing but it's not really anymore. I mean, girls of 15 and 16 have sex these days so it's not that big a deal anymore, but looking from that perspective it might help the process along, you know, becoming a woman because it's a grown-up thing to do, but sleeping with someone won't necessarily mean that you are closer to becoming a woman that you were before.

Whilst these two events may certainly be more important for young women in other social contexts, it highlights the danger of trying to paint this process of transition with broad strokes, or trying to find a specific event that divides female adolescence and young womanhood.

6.2.2 Implications for intervention

In order to develop effective interventions for the multitude of psychological difficulties faced by young South African women, it is important to first describe and understand the issues that young women in the general population are grappling with. Such basic knowledge of the developmental concerns of this age group is needed to form a solid foundation on which to base more specific policies and interventions. In South Africa in particular there is a dearth of information on the normal developmental processes of young women. Low-income women specifically seem to only receive empirical attention in cases where they are faced with a 'problem', such as substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, pregnancy, or prostitution. Research such as the present study may provide insight into the everyday psychological lives of this cohort, information which may be valuable not only in terms of the treatment of psychological problems, but in terms of prevention efforts as well.

Mental health professionals working with females who are in their late teens and early twenties should be aware that their clients are in a transitional period. They should also be aware that while contextual differences exist in how this transition is experienced, clients who come from a background where no specific rites of passage regarding 'becoming a woman' exist, such as the white participants in the present study, might have particular difficulty during this period, and that concerns over readiness to enter womanhood and adulthood may be salient. Such concerns may not only compound any of the other common psychological problems associated with young women in general (such as depression, eating disorders, substance abuse), but may also themselves be exacerbated by other disorders, particularly if their symptoms result in the individual feeling as if they were not making the transition into womanhood successfully. Both of these circumstances may deleteriously influence variables such as self-esteem and feelings of self-efficacy and, therefore, overall psychological well-being. Exploring concerns and anxieties about the transition into womanhood within a therapeutic setting may prove useful not only to work through such concerns but also to provide insight into the ways in which the client thinks about herself.

On a broader level, most feminist therapies argue that because psychological distress stems from socio-political structures, this sphere should also be the focus of attention (Kruger, cited in Spies, 2001). A basic understanding of how context shapes normal development can help to identify which social variables are associated with opportunities or threats for young women. Social variables that are linked to negative outcomes among young women may then be targeted for change. Likewise, from a feminist perspective, discourses which result in the subordination of women (such as the "politics of appearance" and unattainably lofty notions of womanhood) need to be actively addressed on the macro level. Through resistance to such discourses, more positive counter-discourses may emerge that will be less pathogenic for young women. Wolf (1998) has also argued for the value of having clear rites of passage into womanhood, and encouraging the development of more salient markers of what it means to 'become a woman' in cultures where such markers are absent may smooth the progress of the transition for many young women.

6.2.3 Implications for research

In general, there exists a need for more empirical work that can contribute to developing a theoretical understanding of how normal developmental processes work in different social groups. Particularly in a multi-cultural milieu like South Africa, research which focuses on the social contexts in which phenomena are embedded will provide a greater understanding of similarities and dissimilarities in different cultural, racial and class groups. As such, qualitative research, with its inherent focus on context, may be particularly useful in South African research.

Moreover, it is imperative to establish a basis of knowledge on different groups of South African women, particularly those groups (such as low-income women and women of colour) who have traditionally been marginalized by researchers. It is only by first empirically describing the heterogeneous psychological worlds of women that a theoretical understanding of these worlds can emerge. In turn, such understandings are necessary for the design of effective policies and interventions.

In terms of future studies within this topic, given that research on the transition into womanhood is largely absent, there are several avenues open to exploration. For example, within a post-modern and post-structuralist framework, discourse analysis or linguistic studies (particularly looking at the ambivalent use of the signifiers 'girl'

and 'woman' when used to describe females in this age group) could be carried out. Likewise, related research could involve a study of the transition from boyhood into manhood, and could look at the transition into womanhood among other cultural groups and social contexts in South Africa. However, research that aims to explore the transition into womanhood should carefully consider which age group to focus on - the early teens, as is usually the case, or the early twenties, as the current results would suggest. Clearly, deciding where to locate the transition into womanhood will have implications for how the process will be understood.

On another front, the present study has implications for cross-cultural gender research more generally. The two groups of participants used in the present study represent the two groups usually involved in qualitative research - the interviewer/researcher (in this case the University group) and the interviewee/participant (in this case the Community group). How different notions of womanhood between the researcher and the participant may impact on research where women study women has to be considered. In the WMHRP study, for instance, different understandings of womanhood resulted in a situation where, although peers, 'girls' (the University group), were interviewing 'women' (the Community group). While the Community group may largely have considered themselves to be women, the University group did not necessarily see them as such. As Margaret, a member of the University group, said while discussing her understanding of womanhood, "the little pictures my parents fed me when I was little was the feminine, lady-like image. That's what I grew up with and now I look at it as being a 21-year-old girl [*sic*] in [town where research was conducted] having a baby, my picture doesn't accommodate that". Tang (2002) has noted that in peer interviews the influence of social and cultural differences on the interviewer's perception of the interviewees has rarely been emphasized as an important factor in the power dynamic of the interview.

This potential divide between young women researchers and young women participants can be understood in terms of Harris's (2004) argument that modern-day society carves young womanhood into the "can-do" and the "at risk" girl. In this case, the University group can be seen as examples of "can-do" girls, in that they meet many of the criteria for this category, for example their focus on career and delayed motherhood. The Community group members can be understood to fall under the category of "at risk" girls, in that they were not as career-oriented and did not delay motherhood, many of them being teen mothers. The girls/women

conducting research and the girls/women participating in this research may thus exist at opposite ends of a spectrum of present-day young womanhood and may differ significantly. "Can-do" girls, for example, tend to "perceive young motherhood as an unthinkable waste and tragedy" (Harris, 2004, p. 23), something likely to be at odds with how the young mothers themselves portray their roles. These discourses may have important ramifications in terms of the power relations within the interview. Ann Oakley (1981), for example, has advocated a "non-hierarchical" relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, an ideal which may be particularly elusive in interviews where the interviewer and interviewee are separated along broader societal ideas of 'success' in womanhood, and in situations where they come from different socio-economic backgrounds. Moreover, it could be argued that inherent power differences exist in the hierarchical depiction of 'girls' and 'women', with 'women' being positioned in a more powerful position than 'girls', which may again create a power hierarchy within the interview situation.

As such, females doing research on females does not by definition involve a "shared structural position and personal identification", as has been advocated in much of the literature (Finch, 1993, p. 172). This is particularly true where class and cultural differences exist between the researcher and the participant. It is important to bear in mind that similarities in gender, and in this case age, does not nullify the many other differences that exist between women involved in social research. Reid (1993) warns against the "implicit assumption that only quantitative differences separate women's experiences, that is, there is a belief that all women undergo, more or less, the same socialization and oppression" (p. 135). Indeed, the extent to which 'women' can be regarded as a unified category within gender-research in a multi-cultural country such as South Africa is highly questionable.

6.3 Significance of the present findings

The results of this study thus had implications for 1) research, 2) theory, and 3) intervention related to young women in South Africa. Firstly, psychology's lack of empirical work focusing on the psychological worlds of young women results in a fundamental deficiency in our ability to describe different groups of South African women. At the empirical level, the present findings help to fill this gap in our psychological understanding of how womanhood is subjectively experienced by South African women. Secondly, on a theoretical level, results highlight the social and contextual nature of young women's development, identity negotiations, and gender. The findings also challenge common and largely untested assumptions

about female development, most notably the often taken-for-granted notion that the transition into womanhood is situated in early adolescence, and that discrete physical events such as menarche are sufficient to launch the individual into womanhood. This finding may be particularly significant given how closely and how often academics tie the early adolescent years to the idea of 'becoming a woman'. Lastly, the present findings had implications for intervention as it was found that this transition may be a source of stress to individuals, particularly those who feel that they are not 'becoming a woman' when and how they are 'supposed' to, and those who feel that they do not meet the physical and psychological criteria of womanhood. While recognizing the need to also address the socio-political causes of much of the stressors associated with this period, the results also point to the value of discussing issues related to the transition with female clients of this age group, as well as the potential interaction between transition-related concerns and other psychological problems common to this cohort. Given that this age period is associated with an increased risk for psychological ill-health among females (Abrams, 2003), this potential source of anxiety may interact with other stressors in the individual's environment and compound existing psychological vulnerabilities.

To conclude, Simone de Beauvoir's famous words of "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (1972, p. 295) ring particularly true in light of the findings and analysis of the present study. The process of 'becoming a woman' in present-day South Africa involves an intricate interplay of biological and psychological factors, and is largely influenced by social context, in that the subjective understandings and experiences of negotiating one's identity as a woman varies according to where the individual finds herself in terms of socio-economic class, race, and cultural background. The transition into womanhood is best understood as a process that involves an intricate interplay of physical, psychological, social and discursive processes, and is thus heavily influenced by the broader social context within which the individual finds herself.

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Appendix A

Profile of participants

Community group (C)

Code name	Age	Home language	Race	Marital status	Mother?	Occupation of parent/s
Hennelene	22	Afrikaans	Coloured	Unmarried	Yes	Housewife
Anel	19	Afrikaans	Coloured	Unmarried	Yes	Parents deceased
Lindy	20	Afrikaans	Coloured	Unmarried	Yes	Parents deceased
Katrina	20	Afrikaans	Coloured	Unmarried	No	Farm worker
Ronel	25	Afrikaans	Coloured	Married	Yes	Builder

University group (U)

Code name	Age	Home language	Race	Marital status	Mother?	Occupation of parent/s
Angela	22	English	White	Married	No	Engineer
Mary	22	English	White	Unmarried	No	Businessman
Margaret	22	Afrikaans	White	Unmarried	No	Advocate
Janice	23	Afrikaans	Coloured	Unmarried	No	Teacher
Deborah	22	English	White	Unmarried	No	Property consultant

Appendix B

Interview schedule

1. If I say the word 'woman' what comes to mind? And if I say the word 'girl'?
   - Differences between the two
   - Similarities between the two

2. When do you think a girl becomes a woman?
   - If they give an age: why then?
   - Events/processes that have to happen to become a woman, also why do they think this has to do with becoming a woman, how long is this process?

3. Do you think that there is a transition period between girlhood and womanhood in which you are 'not a girl and not a woman'?
   - If answer yes: When is this period; how long is it; when do you stop being a girl; when do you start being a woman; is this period uncomfortable; do you think there is a 'right' age for becoming a woman; If you look at other girls/women you know, when do you think most girls become women?

4. What did your mother tell you about becoming a woman?
   - If mentions menstruation: did she tell you it makes you a woman? Do you agree?

5. Do you see yourself as a girl or a woman? How so?
   - <u>If feel like woman:</u> When did you start feeling like a woman? How would you describe you became a woman; was it sudden or gradual? Why do you think you started feeling like a woman then? How was feeling like a woman different? How did your relationships with others change? Did you feel differently about yourself? Do you think others see you as a girl or as a woman?
   - <u>If feel like a girl:</u> What do you think has to happen for you to feel like a woman? do you want to feel like a woman? Do you feel as if you should feel like a woman already? In what ways do you imagine you'll be different when you do become a woman? Why do you think you don't feel like a woman? Do you think others see you as a girl or as a woman?

6. Do you think the process for a boy to become a man is the same or different as for a girl to become a woman?

- How is it different/similar?
- How and when does a boy become a man?

7. Do you think our notions of what it is to be a woman have changed over the last few decades?

- If yes: How is it different now? Do you think it is easier or more difficult to become a woman now? Why? What do you think caused these changes? Has the importance of motherhood changed? What are the similarities between now and then?
- If no: Do they think it should change? How would they like to see it change?

Questionnaire

1. Based on your own experience, on a scale from 1 to 10, how important do you think the following are in becoming a woman? (1= not important at all; 10 = extremely important)

i) Menstruation
ii) Wearing make-up
iii) Finishing school
iv) Earning an income
v) Looking after others
vi) Turning 21 years old
vii) Living away from home
viii) Driving
ix) Losing one's virginity
x) Becoming a mother
xi) Being involved in a romantic relationship
xii) Being married

2. On a scale from 1 to 10, to what extent do you think womanhood is about being autonomous and independent? (1= not about it at all; 10= very much about it)

3. On a scale form 1 to 10, to what extent do you think womanhood is about being involved in relationships? (1 = not about it at all; 10 = very much about it)

Appendix C

Informed consent form

(An Afrikaans version of this form was presented to Community group participants).

Dear Participant

You are herewith invited to participate in a research study that investigates women's notions of womanhood and how they perceive girls to become women. It is hoped that this information will contribute to our knowledge on female psychological development.

Should you agree to participate in this research, an interview (and possibly two) will be conducted with you. The interview should last between one and two hours and will be conducted by myself in the Psychology Department of the University of Stellenbosch or another location convenient to you.

During the interview you will be asked questions on your understandings and conceptions of girlhood and womanhood, as well as your thoughts on the factors that play a role in a girl becoming a woman. Questions will involve your personal experience of girlhood and womanhood and how it influenced your views of yourself and others. In other words, I would like to understand what being a girl and a woman means to you.

While I trust that you will find the interview interesting, please be aware that you may end the interview at any point and that you can refuse to answer specific questions during the interview. You may likewise end all participation in the research at any time. Should you have any questions for me before, during, or after the interview, you are free to ask them. Should you decide to discontinue your participation in the research project, you may ask that all the data that was collected about you, including tape-recordings and transcriptions of your interview, be destroyed and it will be done.

All information will be considered confidential and only myself and my supervisor, Dr. Lou-Marie Kruger of the Psychology Department, will have access to the tapes and transcriptions. No names or other personal details of yours will be placed on the research material and each participant will be given a specific number and only

referred to by this number to ensure anonymity. Only I will know which numbers refer to which participants and this information will be considered confidential. As soon as the research is completely finished, tape-recordings of the interviews will be destroyed.

Results of the study, including any publications, will not contain the participants' actual names and descriptions of the participants will be modified so that they are not recognizable to anyone reading the study.

This research project forms part of a Master's degree in Psychology as the University of Stellenbosch, and should you have any additional questions on myself or the study, you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Lou-Marie Kruger at 808-3460.

If you are interested to participate in this study, please read the following statement and sign your name:

I understand that participation in this research study is voluntary and I am aware of what the study entails. I accept that I may freely ask questions, as well as refuse to answer questions asked of me, and that I can end the interview, and my participation in the research, at any time. I understand that if I have any questions or problems relating to this study, I can contact Dr Lou-Marie Kruger at the Psychology Department of the University of Stellenbosch.

_____ _____

Signature of participant Date

Appendix D

Sample Interview – Janice (U)

Interviewer: Can I start by asking you, if I say the word 'woman', what comes to mind?

Participant: To me the word woman is not just restricted to someone with beautiful curves, and beautiful looks and a nice body. To me the definition of a woman starts with somebody who's got something up there, so if I had to describe the word woman to someone who doesn't understand English, that's how I would start my definition.

Interviewer: Okay

Participant: Must I elaborate on that?

Interviewer: If you can

Participant: I think it's got to do with the fact that I, as I said to you earlier, I don't have a father, well actually I do, I do, he just doesn't want to do anything with me. So I was raised by a mother, a single parent and for that reason I think I've got a different perspective of women in general, because my mother has always been both to me. I don't see women as the traditional having to be there, having to look after the kids, you know stuff like that, not at all. That's why to me a woman is someone who encompasses so many stuff and that is not just restricted to looks, so ja, that's what a woman means to me.

Interviewer: So you say it's more than just physical?

Participant: Much more, definitely. To be totally honest with you one of my downfalls is I'm a very strict feminist. And all my friends say that because I always, in social conversations and stuff, I'll always be on the look out for where guy friends of ours are sort

of discriminating against us directly or indirectly and I'll always be the one to pinpoint to them you know 'what is that supposed to mean' or stuff like that. So I'm always like standing up for women.

Interviewer: You describe it as a negative though (.20) you said "one of my negative things is that I'm a strict feminist"

Participant: Because I think it's starting to get negative in the sense that it's revealed in so many things, in relationships of mine, even in my own relationship with my boyfriend (.10) There's so many things that I do just to make clear to him that he will not be the one who will be standing on top of me, you understand what I mean?

Interviewer: Ja

Participant: And I try to make that very clear in so many aspects and I try to bring that always forth and that's why I say you get to a point where there needs to be a cut-off line and (.20) I don't always realize and I've had people saying that to me. But once again I think it has to do with the fact that I was raised (.10) I've grown up so conscious of the fact that I don't need a man in my life and for that reason I believe that women can do anything and even so much more than what men can do.

Interviewer: It sounds like you have a very strong picture of what a woman is like.

Participant: Very strong, but as I said Maxie, it has to do with my past and being rejected by my own biological father up until today.

Interviewer: If I say the word 'girl' what comes to mind then?

Participant: Girl would be slightly different to woman because I associate the word 'girl' with somebody that I think either in some cases

but not necessarily for everybody that hasn't had their period yet {laughter} can I say that?

Interviewer: *Ja, no problem*

Participant: And who has little tits that must still grow bigger. Girl is also to me someone who has not experienced full responsibility that goes along with being a full-grown woman, be that (.10) responsibilities to do with like being a mother and everything that is associated with that. So I think girl has a more *innocent* connotation to it.

Interviewer: So would you say the notion of responsibility is quite important to the whole notion of being a woman?

Participant: You see for me I think the biggest distinction between a girl and a woman is that you get your periods and you start literally becoming a woman and the possibility that you start getting engaged in a sexual relationship, and to me that is the biggest difference between a girl and a woman. And that is why I also see responsibility as a part of that, because if you're still a girl and you're not engaging in those kinds of stuff, you don't have to worry about those kinds of stuff, whereas if you do, then it's a total different ball game, so ja.

Interviewer: I see. So would you say getting your period and being sexually active does that in some way make you a woman?

Participant: I would say yes, definitely. Although for some people its not (.5) if I compare myself to for instance my cousin, I mean I got my period when I was fourteen fifteen, my cousin got it when she was nine years old, so I think what I was just saying to you does not necessarily count for everybody, because obviously I mean you can't expect of a nine-year-old to be a woman already. But I think for most people I would say that the moment you get your period and, you know, those things start happening then you go over and the transition phase sets in.

Interviewer: Did you feel more of a woman when you had your period?

Participant: To be totally honest with you, no. I felt a bit humiliated about it, for some reason or the other I (.10) I was probably supposed to be happy on that particular day because it was actually the day after I turned 14 and (.20) I know my mother was very excited about it and she still called my aunt and her other sister-in-law as well, but I just *couldn't believe* that she was doing that, you know, so *no*, I (.30) I wasn't particularly excited about it. I felt like shy, why is this happening to me and it felt humiliating. And I also felt I'm *not ready* to have to enter this world and, you know, ( )

Interviewer: Did you understand it in terms of it being important to becoming a woman?

Participant: That I definitely did. You know, me and my mom had a pretty open relationship so she made it pretty clear to me that already a couple of years prior to that already, why this was necessary for me and (.10) stuff like that and I mean those stuff you actually already come across in school, like in bio. So I did understand that it was necessary for me and actually, to be totally honest with you, I was a bit worried because most of my friends had gotten it already and here I was being the skinniest of them all – I think that's why I got it so late – so I think in that regard I was glad that okay, I am finally, because I got it finally, but still it was a bit yucky to me, I don't know. I think it differs from person to person, I just felt a bit (.30) as I said ( ). I wasn't ready for it and I felt a bit dirty ( ) so.

Interviewer: What did your mother tell you about getting your period?

Participant: My mom had this weird little booklet that I don't know where she got it from, but I could tell, I was about twelve when she told me about everything, but what she didn't know is that I had actually read the thing already {laughter} 'cause it was in her

room so I read it before she told me. (.20) Okay, you asked me what she told me about it. She told me about how when your periods set it then it is a sign that you're becoming a grown woman now and also that it's the time when (.20) when, should a woman have intercourse with a man, it could actually lead to trouble, you know before that it won't happen that you'll get a baby, before you get your periods. I think that was basically all that she said to me, ja.

Interviewer: So did she frame it in the context that it makes you a woman?

Participant: I would say yes, ja, I understood that part right, (.5) ja.

Interviewer: So we've been talking about what a woman is and what a girl is, what do you think are the similarities between the two?

Participant: (.40) That would be (.10) obviously it would still be the same person, a woman would obviously just be a bit older than a girl (.20) but particularly the similarities would be umm (.20) you just underwent a lot of changes, bodily changes and ja, umm (.20) even though you're still the same person you went through a process of having, not having curves, not having stretch marks, but at the end of the day, ja, to me anyway.

Interviewer: So you say it is a physical change?

Participant: It's a physical change and (.20) well emotionally when I think about it, obviously I don't think the mind of a woman doesn't work the same as the mind of a girl because you don't (.5) you think in terms, I think when you become a woman you think about especially stuff connected to the sexual connotations to those things. I suppose you think about it in more depth compared to when you were a little girl or a girl (.10) because obviously you get older and you start wondering about these things.

Interviewer: And the differences between a girl and a woman?

Participant: The differences, umm. (.20) Well, *I have to say this,* a girl doesn't have stretch marks {laughter}. That I definitely have to say because that's something I'm struggling with. The differences would be umm (.20) well, as I said to you earlier, I see a woman who has both got her period, is menstruating, and is most probably or maybe in a sexual relationship, which would not be the case for a girl. I think also in the society I grew up in you become a woman when you engage in these kinds of things, that's how in terms of how I understand it from where I come from. So that's why I think it would be the biggest difference between the two. Even, like I've got friends who got babies when they were in matric or standard nine and they would be different to me because (.10) I've got a friend who had a baby girl when she was in standard nine and we were exactly the same age and to me she was different. She was not like me anymore because she was a mother, you know. So I would think that is the biggest difference.

Interviewer: Could you elaborate on how your friend was different to you?

Participant: Well, actually it wasn't just one friend I had a couple of friends my age and maybe a year older and even younger than myself. She was different to me in the sense that while I didn't know what had been cooking in the pot you know {laughter} I only found out about it afterwards and then all of a sudden I think you look at these people a bit different, you know like '*wow*', you know? I think I was different in the sense that well in the first place I didn't have a boyfriend, so to me I was still alienated (.10) from those kinds of sexual things and anything connected to that. So that was the biggest difference between me and my friend specifically. I couldn't imagine (.10) I mean I wasn't even (.10) at that stage in my life I was in standard nine (.10) I couldn't even imagine those kinds of things, you understand. That was the biggest difference to me and also she just seemed different to me because (.20) or I saw her differently because to me a man *knew her* and vice versa, she

also knew what (.5) that was about. And also, another reason why she was different to me was because I saw her in the same light as my mom (.20) because she was also becoming a mom. So whether she was twenty years younger than my mom, I understood it as she must be the exactly the same as my mom because my mom is a mom and my friend is a mom or she's going to be a mom, so what's the difference? The only difference is that she's much younger.

Interviewer: And looking back at it now do you still see it in the same way?

Participant: Umm, (.40) you know what Maxie, I think yes. And the reason for that being that in this time and age if a friend of mine falls pregnant, I didn't then and still won't now, feel sorry for them because I believe there are so many precautionary measures that can be taken, you have absolutely no excuse whatsoever if you want to take that step. Whereas, back in the day, what happened with me (.10) I was born out of wedlock and so was my brother. But, back in the day, things were much different (.20) you know and the way my mom explained it to me, even if she was to take something it would be like a humiliation because then people would automatically know that you're engaging in this type of stuff. So that is why I would say, thinking about it now, I would still think about my friend in a very same way because I felt very, shall I say, disappointed in her because I thought 'if you really want to do it, fine, if you want to take that responsibility but then you must also be able to carry the consequences' and yet again, as I said, in this time and age I don't see why you should have any excuses unless the person is raped or so, that's totally different. But if you freely make that choice then I can't feel sorry for that person.

Interviewer: If a girl, person, female hasn't had sex yet would you consider her a woman?

Participant: Umm, ja.

Interviewer: Even if she's older, for example 25?

Participant: Umm (.30) Yes, especially around that age. Although it's contradicting what I said to you earlier, because I said to you where I come from and where I grew up, especially in that society you're labelled as a woman the moment when you start doing those things, even though you're maybe only 16 or so, but no, I mean if I come across a 25-year-old woman who is still a virgin and is not the least bit interested in those things, then she's still a woman. She's a different kind of woman but she's still a woman.

Interviewer: Do you think a lot of it is perhaps also an age thing?

Participant: I could say that ja. Age is also related to it.

Interviewer: You mentioned the background that you come from, how would you describe this background?

Participant: It's umm, it's umm, it's definitely not middle class, it's like a normal coloured community, not exactly perhaps in terms of what you've probably seen in [town where WMHRP is conducted], but more or less like that, that's where I come from. People know a lot about each other, that's the reason I said to you that should a young girl get pregnant then everybody will know about it and everybody will look at her differently.

Interviewer: So it's sort of a working class coloured community, is that right?

Participant: Ja, [town of origin] over the years, as I've heard, it has grown, obviously, it is not as small as it used to be. I think back in the day it was the case that everybody used to know everybody, but now it is not like that anymore. So working class, yes, but within that you also get people who have more money and people who have less so ( )

Interviewer: Okay. When do you think a girl becomes a woman?

Participant: I think it is as I said earlier it's, for me, I think at that point exactly where somebody starts menstruating and, obviously it doesn't happen in a day's time, but around about puberty, when you also grow emotionally, your body changes and all those changes that are occurring in and around you. That's about the time when you really go over, step over.

Interviewer: So you say it's emotions and it's physical. Would you say the one is more important than the other?

Participant: No, I would say they're evenly important, because you have to be menstruating, to have breasts to be labelled as a woman I think, but also you also need to, you know, you also need to be emotionally mature enough to be labelled as a woman, obviously you can't act like a five-year-old. So that has to correspond with this new body, you know this whole process.

Interviewer: You say 'mature', what do you understand with this term?

Participant: Mature I see in terms of, well maturity for a woman is well (.20) well first thing I think of is you're not going to play with the little boys now anymore like you used to maybe when you were a little girl, you obviously become more private about certain things, about yourself, and (.30) well, especially, concerning about these things, about menstruation and stuff like that, you're not going to speak about stuff like that to your guy friends so in that regard I think you become a bit more restricted. And what else? I think also a bit more responsibility goes with maturity.

Interviewer: Would you describe this whole thing as a process, becoming a woman?

Participant: Oh yes definitely, because I also see it as something that does not just happen overnight. You don't just wake up the next morning and say 'ooh, I've got all these things, so now I'm a woman' {laughter}. Besides those bodily changes you also need to come to terms with what it is all about, you know, what does it mean for me? And you also need to feel comfortable in that body of yours and in that space where you are. So, yes it is a process. For me specifically as I said to you the day I got my (.50) the day I started menstruating I wasn't particularly ready, I wasn't prepared for it yet, you know. So I needed time to adapt to that. So for that reason I would see it as a process, especially when you're so young. I'm thinking of my cousin who was nine years old. If I felt like that and I was 14 already and I thought I wasn't ready for it, I can't imagine how she felt. So it must be a process.

Interviewer: When you say "wasn't ready for it" do you mean the actual period or the sort of roles that went along with it?

Participant: I think both. Because I think the moment, once again in the society I come from, the moment you start menstruating and stuff like that, now you're labelled as a woman, and obviously that comes along with much more responsibility. And I was scared that the moment I now became a woman that my mom would now expect much more from me, much more responsibility, that they would sommer assume that I would now run the whole household and stuff like that {laughter}. So that was the thing that I was scared of, you know. I was thinking 'am I now supposed to, you know, do all the cooking and washing and stuff like that?' So those were the things that I was scared of.

Interviewer: And you didn't feel ready to do all that?

Participant: Ja, because in my ignorance I thought that came along with (.10) getting your menstruation and I didn't feel ready for that. I think that was my biggest concern on the day that I got it, so

that's why I didn't want to tell even anybody, so ja. But I mean looking back on it now I can see where I went wrong. I was looking at it from a wrong perspective, but I know things now that I didn't know back then.

Interviewer: So what is, do you think, the right perspective of looking at it?

Participant: I don't know if I'll be able to tell anybody 'this is when you're supposed to be ready' because obviously it happens for different people at different times, but looking at it from the right perspective, round about that age of puberty the parent should start preparing the kid both directly and indirectly (.10) for the changes that might occur so long so when it happens the kid will be able to deal with it and then will be able to look at it from the right perspective. I think if my mom had maybe also told me 'you don't need to do all the cooking and washing now' I wouldn't have been so scared, but I didn't know that then.

Interviewer: You say your mom told people when you got your first period. Is it something that lots of people know about, when a girl gets her first period?

Participant: No, actually my mom told my aunt and her other sister-in-law. But that was already too much for me {laughter}. That was too much for me because they still came to me and congratulated me and I felt I could just hide away, you know. No, I wouldn't say that is necessarily the case.

Interviewer: You say they congratulated you. What did they congratulate you for?

Participant: For becoming a woman and, okay, and when it came I knew what it means but I didn't still want to *hear* it, you know {laughter}. So, ja, they congratulated me on that.

Interviewer: If you think of how important this whole issue of having your period is, why do you think it is so important in becoming a woman?

Participant: Umm because I think it's the physical sign, something that you can physically *see*. Besides emotions and that you can see the person is becoming more mature and is handling things in a different way. *That*, getting your period, is the physical sign that it has happened.

Interviewer: So would you see it as sort of a threshold, some sort of transition in becoming a woman?

Participant: Yes, I would say that's how I see it. Yes, it's almost like when guys get their umm thingy {laughter}, well I don't know what exactly they get besides that but it's also like a little, as you said a threshold, or a sign that they've come to a certain stage. So, yes I think so.

Interviewer: Do you think there's a transition period between girlhood and womanhood in which you're not a girl and not a woman?

Participant: Ah ha, the Britney Spears song {laughter}. Most definitely, and although I'm not a fan of hers I would really agree with her. Because it's exactly that, I also experienced it on the day that I got it. I'm supposed to be a woman now but I feel like I'm (.10), you know, a person needs time. You need time to cope with the fact that you need to (.5) that people now also expect of you to act now also more mature and stuff. You need time to get over. To change like that doesn't just happen overnight. So yes, I do think there is a time when you need time to find yourself and to fit yourself into this whole picture, so really (.10) and during that time you yourself would probably not know 'what am I now' or if you had to judge your own behaviour you yourself would not be able to categorize yourself as being a woman or being a girl.

Interviewer: And how long does this take do you think?

Participant: I think at times I *still* don't know what I am. Because, okay, I'm like old enough now to know definitely I'm not a kid anymore, but what I mean is sometimes when, you just do silly things, when you're in your free child state {laughter} when you're in your free child state *that*, to me, you don't necessarily associate with an adult. That is, with an adult woman. So at times like that I think to myself 'what I'm doing now it doesn't fit in with being a grown woman', you know, and at times like that I feel, you know, 'you're not being a grown-up now, you're not being a grown woman now'. But I think to me it's like every time I'm acting spontaneous and silly and just doing silly little stuff, you know.

Interviewer: Does that feel like a girl part?

Participant: That feels like a girl part in that there's somehow supposedly supposed to be suppressed because I'm expected at this time and age to act my age, you know. But then, you know what I mean, there are times when you just want to do silly things and go back to the day when you still had hair with ponytails and were free and did not have to act according to other people's expectations and stuff.

Interviewer: What do you think other people's expectations are?

Participant: Of women in general?

Interviewer: Ja

Participant: Well, for one thing, I should actually have been working now. That's just also the norm for my society, you know. I should actually be working and around this age now, around 25 or 24, ( ) you should start thinking of getting married; I'm getting *old* {laughter}. So, ja, in that regard I'm not living up to my expectations, because I should actually have a job now and

start thinking about getting engaged, you know, stuff like that. But that's also where I tend to differ from that, like if I had to think about how I plan my life, I'm not going to get married until I'm about thirty or so, because I still want to do what *I* want to do. So in that regard I'm not living up to the expectations of where I come from.

Interviewer: You say sometimes you feel there (are girl aspects to being a woman), do you think it is a good thing or a bad thing?

Participant: No, I love it {laughter}. People always, I don't know, I can't think of anything like specific now, but there are just times when I just feel like being silly and I think every now and again a person need that, like especially when you've got all these vent up feelings and stuff like that, or maybe after a period of, you know like now with the exams, you're all stressed and stuff and you're just thinking about one thing, nothing else and you just need time after that to just relax and (.20), you know, be free, exactly what is expected when you're in your free child state or the things that are associated with that. So, no, I don't think it's a bad thing at all. Just not like all the time, and if you are in that state it should be at an appropriate place and time.

Interviewer: So not all the time?

Participant: No, no, not all the time please {laughter}

Interviewer: Why not?

Participant: Like, for instance, the way we're sitting now, okay, if I was wanting to be silly I could sit like this or like whatever like I want to. I can't like sit like this in class, you understand what I'm saying? Now, what I'm saying about the whole place and time, there's a place and time for your free child and your woman state. I can't sit like this in class, you understand what I mean? I have to be all prim and proper {laughter}

Interviewer: I see

Participant: Exactly, so that's what I mean

Interviewer: Do you think there is ever a stage that this girl or child aspect will go away?

Participant: No, no because I've seen grown-ups before who are years older than myself that still act silly. And to be totally honest with you I think it is something that needs to be in a person, regardless of age ( ) they need to be able to unwind every now and again ( )

Interviewer: Earlier you used the word adult. Do you think there's a difference between being an adult and being a woman?

Participant: Being an adult woman or being a woman?

Interviewer: Is there a difference between the two?

Participant: (.20) Ja, (.10) ja. You know why? Because I said to you earlier a woman (.10) where I come from a woman could be a 16-year-old girl that has a kid, whereas an adult is somebody that's older, but doesn't necessarily have to have a kid, you know. So I think the main difference between an adult and an adult woman would maybe be age or so.

Interviewer: So do you think it's purely to do with age?

Participant: Well other things as well but that's the main distinction that I can make between the two because, as I said to you, where I come from ( ) so, but to me, that doesn't really make that person *grown-up* because how can you expect a 16-year-old girl who has a baby to be grown-up, you know. Whereas an adult, say maybe ten years older, like a 26 year old woman, say for instance that woman has also got a child, but that woman would in so many aspects would be so much wiser

than the 16-year-old due to life experiences she's gone through. So I do think there's a difference between them, yes.

Interviewer: So if I was to ask when do you *stop* being a girl, what would you say?

Participant: It's like what I just said to you. I think it's an integral part of every woman. You don't have to stop being a girl, you just put it away in the closet and take it out every now and again, you know. So it's also what we talked about earlier about what is appropriate at the right place at the right time. But especially being a woman people always expect you to act a certain way, look like, you know, you're supposed to look like, you can't like dress like all, how can I say, people don't see you in the same light as a guy or a man, obviously, because you also need to look like your looked after, you need to look clean and proper and stuff like that and it's almost like one doesn't necessarily have to do what society expects of you, you nevertheless do it in any case. So for that reason I think we need every now and then to feel free not to pay attention to all that stuff and just be yourself, you know, just be free. You don't necessarily have to wear a dress to be a woman, you know, you can wear pants also to be a woman. So ja, I think you need to have it within you, it doesn't matter ( ).

Interviewer: So would you say you never stop being a girl?

Participant: For me personally, no {laughter}

Interviewer: And when do you start being a woman?

Participant: When do you start? Once again, I think that goes along with that whole, when you maybe get married and then I think when you have intercourse with a man and (become a mother).

Interviewer: Do you see becoming a mother as quite important?

Participant: Ja, you know in some societies being a woman is defined as someone that must bear kids and I think everybody expects that a woman, somewhere along the line, must bear kids. I think that's the perception that is out there. So, yes, I do think it's an important part but I also think it's up to yourself. You know, if you don't want to do it, if you don't want to have kids ever in your lifetime it depends on your beliefs, I just think it makes you more of a woman than not having kids, I think so.

Interviewer: Why do you think this is so?

Participant: Well because then you're almost like the same as a man {laughter} because you never knew what it was like and I mean it's actually a privilege because guys can't do it, they can't have kids, they can't have babies, so why not? At least it's one thing you can do that they can't do. But the downfall of that is now you get all stretch marks and all ugly cellulite and stuff {laughter}. I think you must think 'no I'm not ready for my body to look like that'.

Interviewer: Do you think this period of sort of being between a girl and between a woman is an uncomfortable period?

Participant: Uncomfortable? Yes, because not only due to expectations that you have of yourself but also due to the external influences that act upon you. You're not supposed to be ( ) And it can be difficult in that you can experience a lot of conflict. Maybe you still want to be a little free kid that plays in the sand and plays with sand, but because you got your periods now or you're supposed to become a woman now you're expected to act different. So that it why I think it can be difficult, especially for people who aren't really ready yet to approach that phase.

Interviewer: What do you think are society's expectations?

Participant: Well, in general I think there are a lot of trends that coincide, but I just think in some societies it's more acceptable for girls to become women like at a very young age already, especially in the more lower classes of society. (.20) Sorry what was your=

Interviewer: =the societal expectations=

Participant: =about being a woman or about becoming a woman. Well, the more I think of becoming a woman, the transitional phase can be a different stage in different societies, but I think the expectations are mainly the same, increased responsibility ( ) that whole aspect of she's supposed to be feminine and caring and (she's supposed to be caring about those younger than herself), especially where kids are concerned. Becoming a woman in most societies I think is associated with that caring aspect, you know, you're supposed to be more concerned with things in and around the house, but it's not the same for guys.

Interviewer: How is it different for them?

Participant: Man we're still living in a very patriarchal society and it's going to take time before that's going to change. So becoming a woman just intensifies those expectations. Like when you're a little girl they're already going 'you're going to become a teacher or a nurse or something' so when you become a woman you basically have to umm, to umm (.10) *justify* those decisions that were already made about you and every now and then there pops up a girl who totally contradicts these expectations and goes out to become an (.20) engineer or something like that. I think generally expectations are very much that type of traditional role of the woman, in the kitchen, having kids, then the granny, you know that type of thing. But, yet again I must also say that's not true for everybody because its not.

Interviewer: Do you think there's a right age for becoming a woman?

Participant: (.30) I wouldn't say 'right' I'd say maybe an ideal phase, but then again it wouldn't be right for everybody. 14 is probably still okay, but for some people that's very late, yet I still didn't feel ready for it. But for different people it comes at different ages and also because I think people deal with stuff in general differently so I wouldn't be able to say 'okay, 18 is now the age that you're supposed to go over or become that' because some people will be ready for that way before that whereas others, you know, won't. So you can't say it will be for everybody at the same time.

Interviewer: What did your mother tell you about becoming a woman?

Participant: Ja, she told me about (.30) I can't remember now what she told me specifically. It's what I told you about how she told me about the menstruation, that she had that little booklet that I know for a fact that she told me about the stuff but I actually read it up already. So what she was telling me I knew she got from the book, I had just read it before her {laughter}. Yeah, so, ja that was basically what she told me.

Interviewer: So she framed it within the context of menstruation?

Participant: Yes, no that was the most important part of it.

Interviewer: Did she say anything about having sex and how important that is to be a woman?

Participant: She said that but after she mentioned the whole menstruation and how that leads up to you becoming a woman and why menstruation, being able to menstruate and should you have sex how that could lead to you falling pregnant.

Interviewer: So for her would you say would you say the primary thing is the whole idea of menstruation?

Participant: I would say yes because that leads up to other things. You can't have a baby and not menstruate yet, that's why I said to you she explained it to me in terms of that, its almost like a hierarchy.

Interviewer: Would you say that her view on it is representative of your community's view on it?

Participant: Yes. I think in general, at least where I come from, coloured people compared to white people are not that open, not that frank about specifically the topic of sex and that kind of things and for that reason we don't talk about those things.

Interviewer: Sorry, do you mean coloured people don't talk about those things?

Participant: No, I said compared to white people coloured people don't talk about those things as much because (.5) I think I got that impression because I did ballet with a white girl in standard one so I got the impression it's more liberal concerning that. They talk about it in the house and stuff and I'm like 'whoa' {laughter}. I would say what my mom told me is more or less what other coloured girls mom's also told them. But that's just what I'm assuming, there can be cases where I can be very much wrong, but I would say more or less it's the same. I think I was actually privileged to have a mom that told me that much about it. I think it has to do with the fact that she was a teacher so she knew how to do with kids and how inquisitive they are and stuff. She probably might have told me a bit more than my friends were told by their mothers.

Interviewer: Do you think most of your friends were told something specifically about womanhood?

Participant: You know what, Maxie, we never really talked about it. It's just one of those things that we never really talked about. Obviously when I got it I talked to my friends about it but we

never really talked about it in depth and (.30) I also felt that, I wasn't the same as many of my friends in that my mom wasn't married and I don't have a father and so that was also something that wasn't very comfortable for me.

Interviewer: Did you see your friends who had already menstruated as women?

Participant: I wouldn't say necessarily as women, I saw them as different. There was this one friend of mine, she got her period when she was in primary school already and I couldn't imagine, I mean this girl was even, I mean I'm not tall or anything but she's like shorter than me and she's like very petite and everything, I couldn't believe it, you know. And I saw her as very different, you know, and I always wanted to tell her 'don't go near the boys' {laughter}. I was scared something would happen. So it was difficult for me to think about something like that at such a young age already. I promise you she got it when we were in standard four, so wow, I was like, although we were exactly the same age I couldn't imagine what she was going through because I just wasn't ready. And I never asked her much about that because I just didn't want to know about that.

Interviewer: Do you agree with your mother in terms of menstruation making you a woman. Would you agree with what she told you?

Participant: Umm, I would say to a certain extent yes. Because you can't not menstruate and be a woman. That's one of the main things, one of the main differences between a man and a woman. A man can't menstruate. And a girl that doesn't menstruate (.20) I don't know where exactly this came up but I grew up knowing that the word 'woman' means somebody that menstruates. You know, so I don't know if it really is like that, if it's somewhere written up in some academic books or so, but I grew up thinking like that and so that's why I would think that is

the case. I wouldn't see someone who doesn't menstruate as a woman.

Interviewer: Do you see yourself as a girl or as a woman?

Participant: {Laughter} I see myself in that in-between phase, although it shouldn't be like that because, as I said to you, I'm 23 years old already, but, you know, I'm so (.50) the Afrikaans word is wispeldurig [vacillating] in the sense that I like to take up the responsibility to be prim and proper every now and then but it is *so nice* to change between these things and it's just so nice to be free and stuff like that. So, to answer your question, I see myself as a woman when I want to be one, when I need to be all like there, but I can act like a kid when I want to. I can act like both ways, well not *act* I can *be* any one of those two.

Interviewer: You say you're in-between, do you think you're moving towards some sort of phase where you'll feel more like a woman?

Participant: I don't know Maxie, for me personally, as I said to you, I only want to start having kids when I'm like 30 or so because I first want to live my life and get a career before I even think about settling down. So, I don't know, up until then, up until the day that I get married to somebody I think I'd still see myself as a girl, simply as free, that doesn't have all that responsibility, but once I'm hooked down that's a totally different ballgame also, but ja.

Interviewer: Are you saying you'll feel like a woman once you get married and settle down?

Participant: I think ja because, I mean, because although I have a boyfriend now I'm not married to him so if I want to look at another guy I can do that. Whereas a married woman can't do that, although nowadays things like that do happen, but it's the principle of it that counts. That's why I'm saying when you're

married then you're bound to your husband and your responsibilities and your kids as well. Whereas when you're not it's not necessarily that way.

Interviewer: When you started to feel more like a woman, how did your relationships to other people change?

Participant: I don't think I was ever consciously aware that (.20) I wouldn't say that I was ever, you know, at some point aware that 'okay, now I feel much more like a woman and now I am going to act accordingly'. (.20) So sorry I'm not able to answer that.

Interviewer: You say it's not something you gave much thought to?

Participant: No, yet again it comes back to the fact that for me it came too early, although 14 years is not that young, 14 years is actually the right age, but umm (.30) am I answering your question?

Interviewer: Umm, (.15) I'm just interested in whether you feel that it is something that happened to you because you got your period or if it's something that you sort of had to go through emotionally, cognitively.

Participant: No, I think it was a combination of both. Of both because, umm (.20) also you need to incorporate the bodily changes. No it's definitely not just the period. It is everything that goes along with it. Also like, once again, like all the expectations that go along with it. The period itself is obviously the main factor, but that just triggers so many other things that goes along with it.

Interviewer: So did you feel or think to yourself that this is some sort of phase I'm going through or is it something you didn't give much thought to?

Participant: Umm, I didn't give much thought to?

Interviewer: Becoming a woman. Did you ever think of it?

Participant: Umm (.50) I know I was tackled with similar thoughts like that when I found out about my friends. Look they didn't get all pregnant at the same time but then they ( ) and I thought to myself I was never ready for becoming a woman in the first place when I got my period in the first place, so I always felt behind, you know. If people of my same age were getting kids already I always felt that I was lacking something. So, to me also it felt that I would never get to that point in my life where they were already. So whether I saw it as a phase, yes I could say that, but then I saw it as a phase that I was and probably still am not getting through, you understand? Or, even if so, that I'm doing it very slowly. But I can explain that in terms of many things. I think also, to me, it was, being a woman was also very physical. Look I've always been very skinny. I was always the skinniest out of everybody, but it was not like I was ever wanting to be skinny, it was just like that, you know. And I got my periods when I was 14 years old and I was the last one to get it. Once again I was the last one to start growing breasts and that also felt to me, in so many regards I felt I was lagging behind, you see? So that to me was also, I mean to be totally honest with you I probably only started getting breasts when I came to university. And so, to me, I always felt 'gee wiz everybody is there already and I'm not going to get there' and I also saw getting breasts and getting curves and stuff as being a woman, as being part of it and I just felt, even up until today, comparing myself to my friends, I'm still lagging behind. And another thing that I was telling you about is this whole stretch mark thing. Okay, it doesn't (.10), just as an example, when we were in standard seven, standard eight many of my friends started getting them. Gosh, I didn't even have titties yet so what more about stretch marks, you understand. That was something that I couldn't even imagine, it was totally something that I was not aware of and I started getting it last year only and I mean I'm postgraduate now already, so in so many regards I'm *still* behind. And that's why I'm saying even

if I'm 23 years old today and you ask me that question I'll say to you 'well, I don't think I can really become a woman until I get all the stuff that's associated with being a woman, like the stretch marks and the titties and those kinds of stuff'. And I think the reason I also felt that I lagged behind was this physical things as well.

Interviewer: Do you still feel as if you lag behind?

Participant: Well, I know now that there are people with smaller tits than myself {laughter} so I'm not worried about that anymore. Like when I'm talking about the physical thing specifically, this whole stretch mark thing is something that I really have a serious difficulty dealing with, and people that I talk to about it say that I'm really making a big deal out of it, but my justification for it is because I'm only getting it *now*, you understand, and my friends got it back in the day already, in high school. So to me it's very traumatic because I got it so suddenly and now I need to deal with it. And all those things contribute to me feeling that I'm still a bit behind. I got my periods late, I got everything late so to me it feels I need another two three years to get to where my friends were at two, three years ago already, you see?

Interviewer: Just to talk about the stretch mark thing a bit more. You said now now that getting stretch marks sort of implies becoming a woman, that it's part of that whole package, am I right?

Participant: It's part of the whole packet, ja.

Interviewer: And you say now you're getting that and it's kind of traumatic for you. Would you say it traumatic because you're getting it late or because it implies you're becoming a woman now? Could you just elaborate on that a bit?

Participant: I think it's both. Look Maxie, my mom was here now for my graduation and she had a lot of difficulty dealing with it, in trying to comfort me, 'this is okay, you need to accept this'.

Interviewer: Sorry, by this do you mean?

Participant: The whole stretch mark thing and what (.20) you know, but it's because, to me Maxie it's because I got it so late. I mean I'm 23 years old, you know what I'm saying. I never knew this and when I did actually have any contact with it whatsoever I saw it on friends of mine, but that was five years ago when I was in standard 7 or standard 8, you understand what I'm saying? So, (.30) {tearful} so I couldn't really deal with the fact that 'why am I getting the stuff now?' So it has once again contributed to me feeling that I was lagging behind other people and I think that's also why I've had such a hard time dealing with it because everybody is saying to me '[name] you're really getting boring now, just stop talking this because you're blowing the whole thing out of proportion'. But if, you know, getting it now only, that is why because they've had it already for such a long time and now I get it and that's why it's so difficult for me to deal with it. And, yes, I also will see it as being part of a woman because it means like you're getting curves in places where maybe didn't have or your body's becoming more rounded or whatever because a couple of years ago when you were younger you didn't have that, you know, so it's something you need to deal with, this ( ).

Interviewer: Are you seeing getting curves etcetera in a positive light or in a negative light?

Participant: You know, it's also I think the influence society plays. You know, you can't imagine how much society influences one. For that reason I think to a certain extent it's a good thing. They all want this whole skinny image and stuff like that but you're supposed to look like in a certain way or, stuff like that. You're supposed to have curves but up to a certain extent, you

know. I see it as a positive, but once again it came a bit late, but to be totally honest with you at least a good thing about that is if I compare myself to all my friends who got this five six years ago and I know I'm lagging behind, whereas I'm starting to get curves around here and they've already been there so long ago and now it's not looking very good anymore {laughter}. So it's good that I started late. But, yes Maxie, I do see it as being positive because I mean in general coloured people are very much like also black people in that they like the whole bigger lower, the big bottom kind of thing. So that's also a part of being a woman, you associate that with being a woman or having breasts, you associate that with being a woman. And also I think you, just like it's the case with men, if you don't have these things you feel that you can't then compare to other people that do. So it's also those physical things that play a role, especially if you start comparing yourself to other people.

Interviewer: So do you think if you were much more curvaceous that you would feel more like a woman?

Participant: In certain departments yes, I would {laughter}, but just in that certain department {laughter}. But that again Maxie definitely has to do with the way that society labels everything and I think it's actually a pity. It's a pity but it's just the way things are.

Interviewer: If I was to say that although perhaps physically one doesn't feel like a woman you can feel emotionally like a woman, would you agree with that? That perhaps even if you don't physically feel like a woman that you can perhaps still emotionally feel like one?

Participant: You know what you just said makes me think back about (.10) Dr. Kruger once bought a person that underwent a sex change. That person came and spoke to us in class and that was a very traumatic experience for me because I wasn't ready to deal with something like that and I don't think any of

the other students in the class were. I can't at this point in time in my life imagine how you can emotionally feel like a woman without really being a woman, without having those physical signs of being a woman. To me it's just something I can't imagine. But if there are cases where that's possible as I've seen now with my own eyes, ( ) it's possible but it's hard for me (to imagine something like that).

Interviewer: Do you think if you fill out more that you'll feel more like a woman?

Participant: It's also, as I said to you, in a certain department yes {points to breasts}, but not in other ways, no. But in general I think a woman needs to have those physical signs. You need to see the person has well-rounded hips and has breasts. You see something like that and you know it's a woman and not a man. But I think it's in general, I mean you know how men compare themselves also in different departments, it's like those are the things that distinguish us from guys. But if you don't have that, or if you have it in a very lesser extent, then it becomes a bit shaky.

Interviewer: Shaky. What do you mean by shaky?

Participant: Like there's this other girl that stays there where I stay. She's very flat, you know like *flat*, she doesn't have much here so it's like if you look at her from behind, or even, to be totally honest with you, from the front then you won't really see what's the difference between her and a guy. So what I'm saying to you Maxie is that I *do* think, yes, I'm not saying you have to look like Pamela Anderson, but there *needs* to be those things that distinguishes you from men. And you don't have to have the perfect body in order to have that, but there needs to be those things so that you can physically feel this body that I'm in is a body of a woman, and it needs to differ in certain areas in order for you to feel different from a man.

Interviewer: This person that you live with, do you consider her as a woman?

Participant: You know, I really get to see her very often and I think to myself, no. But honestly, when I look at her, she's also skinny like me but she really lacks in this department, in the breast department, and even if you look at her from the side or from the front you honestly (.5) and I think it also contributes that she's got short hair, so it's probably wrong of me to think of her as less of a woman, but I tend to do that. And to be totally honestly with you I think a guy that will see her will also tend to notice those things, you understand. So I think you need to have those things in order to distinguish you from a guy. And as I said to you, it's probably wrong of me to think of her as less of a woman, but it's the case.

Interviewer: You've sort of been saying that in some ways you feel like you're lacking in the breast department. Do you think that, in a similar way to what you've been describing now, it makes other people think of you as less of a woman?

Participant: Well, I have seen people with less than myself so that can't be the problem. To be totally honest with you there's a friend of mine that is more or less got the same body build as mine, and she's got humongous breasts. And I've always wanted bigger breasts but if I look at her I see that at least if I look at myself in the mirror then at least everything is in proportion, you know I don't have to bind a towel or something around me when I walk because my ass is too big. I don't need to be ashamed of myself. So at least in that regard I can say, okay, I'm fine. Whereas the bigger breasts I've always wanted, she's got hell on earth everyday because that's the first thing people see when they see her. They don't see [friends name], they see her breasts first and that works on her so much and we talked about it last and she said to me 'Janice, you don't want to go there, you want people to see you for who you are, you don't want people to first notice your breasts, and then they start

talking to you'. So I thought about it and thought 'no, then rather that', and its true also - I'd rather have everything in proportion rather than the one thing standing out and the rest lagging behind. But, Maxie, it is like that. Unfortunately the society they are very pro big breasts, that's just the way it is and I don't think that much about the big behind but big breasts is everywhere, as you know yourself. And it's really (.5), it's a pity that it's like that, but it's one of those things and people define being a woman as partly *that*. It's a very big thing, especially in the town I was born in and used to live in.

Interviewer: Do you think people see women who don't have big breasts as less of a woman?

Participant: I would think so. Even in everyday society it's like that. You know even in the little place that I come from I get that impression and really it's such a pity that it is like that. Why, it's always so funny to me, why do they always make such a big hassle of this big breast thing, but why don't they maybe change that to guys also. Like expect guys to have gorgeous shoulders or bigger whatever, you understand what I'm saying? The focus is so much on women, we're supposed to look like a certain way, you know, whatever. If it was in my capacity I would do something about it but I can't, it's just the way it is. The funny thing is, me being small breasted, I've got more of a problem with it than, for instance, my boyfriend does. He's like '[name], just accept it, accept yourself and, you know, you're not that bad and what's your problem, I don't see anything wrong with you', but I'm the one and you know, the funny thing is I would expect *him* to have a problem with it, but he doesn't. *I'm* the one who has a problem with it and I have to have other people tell me 'you're okay', you know. So here I'm sitting saying to you that it's society that's doing it, but I myself am also doing it, you know. So it's a bit of both, it's a vicious circle.

Interviewer: Do you think the fact that it bothers you so much, the small breasts, has got anything to do with the strong connection between breasts and being a woman?

Participant: I must say in my case, I can't say it's for everybody. But that's also, Maxie, that's also one of the things that I've always ( ). You know, me being already so skinny, my friends used to make fun of me when I was in school, the guys in my class. That is why that once again contributes to me always feeling like I was lagging behind. If all the girls of my same age had breasts that had twice my size, what was wrong with me? I was always thinking about it, you know. That was also I felt I can't be a woman until the day I actually have breasts that people can see and not have to zoom in to see what is that, you know? So yes, I have to say that for me personally it played a big role, but I think it's understandable because I was ( ).

Interviewer: Considering that at your age there's not much chance of more development in the breast area=

Participant: =no {laughter}=

Interviewer: =do you think you'll ever feel completely like a woman?

Participant: Umm (.20) you know what, if I compare myself to people of my age and in general people – I still do that – and I'll probably never catch up, but that's something that on a daily basis I'm able to come to terms with much more. Especially when I see people who actually have less than myself and who are actually much less in proportion than myself then I say 'thank you God that you had a special vision for me and ( )'. Because for instance that girl that I mentioned to you, she's not in proportion. So, umm, yes, even though I would still feel that I'm lagging behind and despite of what my big-breasted friends told me about it, I'd still feel like I'm lagging behind but that's just my dysfunctional cognition {laughter}. And umm, ja, and I

think it also has to do with the fact that I had a brother in the house when I was growing up who was always obsessed with big breasts and his sister grew up never to have any of those and I was always very conscious of it. And I mean, even today, Maxie, my cousin that I told you about that's nine years old, she's got bigger breasts than me. So I always feel that I'm lagging behind, it's a pity that I feel that way and I probably need to work on that, but (.20) ( ).

Interviewer: Do you think others see you as a girl or as a woman?

Participant: Others. Um: (.40). Can I distinguish between guys and girls? If I talk about my guy friends I think they see me as a woman. But, (.20) I think it's also when I interact with guys you do act different, especially with guys older than yourself or our age. I won't act as silly as I do with my girl friends, because then I don't need to stay all prim and proper and then I can act the way I would have acted when I was five years old. So I think there's a difference between if you were to ask a guy friend of mine he would answer that question differently to a girl friend of mine would answer that question. With my girl friends I'm just so free. It's just so nice being all stupid and stuff. But with my guys you can't really do that, unless it's someone that you know really well or it's someone you grew up with. Although I have to say with my boyfriend I'm either way. With him I can be anything, it doesn't matter.

Interviewer: So are you saying that, men/guys tend to see you as a woman and your girl friends more of a girl?

Participant: I would say that, I would say yes. But it's obviously a direct result of how I act. I won't act all silly and be all silly like I am with my girl friends with guys. But the only distinction is with my boyfriends, with him I can do anything, it doesn't matter.

Interviewer: Do you think that the process for a boy to become a man is the same or different as for a girl to become a woman?

Participant: Umm, there are certain areas where they do overlap but by far it's not as intense as becoming a woman. If you just think about the monthly stuff we have to go through, geez if I had to start talking about that (.20) but that's another thing, you know. They don't have to go through those things. They go through that whole adam's apple thingy and as far as I know that's it. Also that whole nightly dreams that they have, but that's not something that hurts, they don't get period pain every month and in some cases, like myself, sommer twice a month, you know. So, yes, they also go through a process but it's not as intense and they do not get reminded about it on a monthly basis. And always when I talk about it I feel it's so unfair. What we have to go through, the pains and all that goes along with it. So they don't go through a process like that. As far as my knowledge serves me their process, especially the nightly process is actually *nice*, compared to what we go through.

Interviewer: So you say on the physical level there are differences, do you think on the emotional level there are similarities or differences?

Participant: On the emotional level it's something totally different. Once again the role that society plays is actually quite intense for them, because they are expected to (.50) actually I think a lot more responsibility is expected on their side, especially from external sources, because they are men. Because once again in the patriarchal society we live in they are expected, 'okay you're now a man, do all the things that men do, take on responsibilities, run everything ( )'. So if I have to compare the changes they undergo I would say that they don't undergo as much physical changes as women but the emotional responsibilities and stuff is bigger than for women, for us. But that's only due to what is expected of them from outside people.

Interviewer: You're talking about society's expectations. What do you think society expects of women?

Participant: Of women in general? Well, it's just part of our role. In general, if you had to start with the way, with the outer appearance of women they've got certain perceptions. If you look a certain way then you're rated in a certain category and it's just one of the harsh realities of life. Also they expect of women, but things have been changing over the past couple of years, especially in the society we live in now, I think those boundaries between men and women aren't that, umm. (.10) especially in the occupation world women are actually reaching a higher level than what was a couple of years ago. So I think, from society's point of view, they're starting to see women as more competent than a couple of years ago and that we are actually able to do more than a couple of years ago. We don't necessarily have to stay at home and be homemakers and so on.

Interviewer: So when does a boy become a man?

Participant: Umm, geez, (.20) I hadn't thought about that. I think that will also be, I think for guys it will also be when they have intercourse with somebody. To be totally honest with you I don't know when exactly or what they go through puberty. I can't say they become a man when they get pubic hair and stuff, so I think I'm going to say when they have intercourse, that's when.

Interviewer: How do you think being a woman is different to being a man?

Participant: There are so many differences really. Apart from just the physical differences, the bodily differences between us, there are so many differences. The roles that you play, the expectancies, the things that you yourself decide for yourself, and besides the influence that society has on us, it's the different roles that we ourselves also play out. But to come

back to your question, I think the main difference would be in the way women think. They think differently than men. Just in the way they think, they think about different things.

Interviewer: Could you give an example?

Participant: Well, I think in general they're more sensitive about things. They give thought to things much more. For example, within my boyfriend's friends one of the guys was cheating on his girlfriend. But he's been going out with this girl for something like four years now, and all his guy friends knew about it, and they all know this girl also but they never told her. And I also just got to know about a year ago about this whole cheating thing and I wanted to tell her because I know that it was wrong, what was being done to her was wrong. But I told the guys before that I'm going to tell her that her boyfriend has been cheating on her, but they were so amazed, I mean how could I want to do that, stick my nose in other people's business. But that's not the way I thought about it, I thought about it in terms of how this is bad for her, how this is going to have a negative effect on her, and how they, as so-called friends of hers couldn't face up to it and tell her. I mean they spoke to her every single day but not wanting to tell her. So that is just a simple example of how I think guys think differently from girls. There are so many other examples also. One of the main differences is also girls gossip a lot, or women, guys don't. ( )

Interviewer: Do you think gossiping is quite an important part of being a woman?

Participant: As much as I hate to say it, I think it is part of the nature of a woman, you know. I don't know why and actually I would prefer it ( ), but women do it so subconsciously, they don't even have to think about doing it, they just do it. {laughter}

Interviewer: Okay, this question relates a little bit to what we said earlier, do you think our notions of what it is to be a woman have changed over the last few decades?

Participant: Yes, as I said to you, especially in South Africa I think it has changed but yet it also differs from place to place. Like where I come from ( ). Part of the reason I think I'm such a feminist is because I grew up not with a father but with a grandfather in the house who is *years* older than myself and he used to set up these rules in the house ( ) and I, as the youngest in the house was always the one to rebel against what he said. I always questioned his rules and regulations because I couldn't live up to them. I always wanted to know 'why is this like this just because you, as a man, say it must just be like this', you know? So, they know I'm the little rebel of the house in terms of questioning orders, especially where there are sex differences. He said that my grandmother must stay in the kitchen where she must look after the kids, see to the food and look after the house, and he'll stick to the stuff outside. But he himself would stick his nose into the stuff going on inside the kitchen and the house, and I always wanted to know, but he's the one that set that rules, yet he's mixing it up, you know. And if my grandmother used to complain about how the yard looked outside then he used to just tell her to stick to her own business inside the house. You understand what I'm saying? I could not take that. It's a simple example, but that's just something that was a clash to me already from when I grew up, because I grew up with those silly little rules and I always wanted to question them. But, I know also that things have changed recently, also in [home town]. When I was in Standard 8 or 9, a lady became our principal and that was a big thing because that was the first ever in [home town], the first time in our community that a lady got such a position. So these things have been changing rapidly, but slowly, and it's going to take time for us to ( ).

Interviewer: Do you think it's easier or more difficult to become a woman now?

Participant: (.40) Easier, I think. I think it depends. You know what, actually I think it might be a bit more difficult. Because back in the day the rules were laid out so clearly – this is what women do, this is what they are like. Now that the boundaries have been shifted, things aren't that clear anymore. And now, since women can do everything they want to, I think it's more difficult, because women now become aware that they can do things they never used to do, so now you actually need to zoom in to ( ).

Interviewer: Do you think the importance of motherhood has changed?

Participant: Yes, I do. You know, if I think about all these laws concerning abortion and all those things, then, yes, I think it has changed. And also more people are aware of the fact that men can also sit and look after the kids, just like women do. And especially now with women also being able to work, men are now also in a position to stay at home and do those traditionally female things ( ) and so I think the role of motherhood has shifted in that it's not just restricted to the mother having to do everything.

Interviewer: Umm, okay, that's basically the interview part. For the next thing what I'd like you to do is, on a scale from one to ten, rate the following things in how important they were to you personally in your process of becoming a woman. One being not important at all and ten being extremely important, in terms of how important they were to the whole process. The first one is getting your first period.

Participant: Ten

Interviewer: Ten. And, sorry, can you elaborate on why you think it is so.

Participant: You can't (.20) if you don't have your period you can't have kids and then you can't have that thing that distinguishes you from a man or from a male. Therefore, you need your period in order to have kids in order to be a woman, so that's why it's very important.

Interviewer: Wearing makeup?

Participant: Na:, my boyfriend doesn't even like it. No, that depends. On a scale from one to ten that's a two.

Interviewer: Two. So you don't think it's important?

Participant: No man, it's your personal decision. Just the other day I was at the bank and there's this lady and she wears way too much make-up, and I'm thinking 'lady, where are you, I'm looking at all this make-up'. So no man, you should use it to enhance yourself but it shouldn't *be* you, it shouldn't define you. It should bring out your lips or your eyes or whatever, it shouldn't become *you*.

Interviewer: Leaving school?

Participant: Leaving school?

Interviewer: Ja.

Participant: Um:, a nine, because I believe that women are in the position to get an education, to educate themselves nowadays, to get into positions in society where they can actually earn money, just like men do. So I think you need to get to that step so that you can enter the world ( ) so that you can earn money. ( )

Interviewer: Earning an income?

Participant: Also the same, also a nine. Must I elaborate? Ja, it's basically the same. I believe that just as men can take on the roles of

the women, now, exactly the same as that I believe women can also ( ), so they'll be able to earn an income, in order to do that.

Interviewer: Looking after others?

Participant: I think that's an integral part to being a woman, but in this society of ours, you must be able to juggle that with an occupation, so I think I'd give that an eight.

Interviewer: Why do you think it's such an integral part of being a woman?

Participant: I think it's always been like that, you know. Ever since creation, I mean like look at the animals, the mother (.10) mother animal always looks after the baby, you know, it's not the man. He just goes out, you know, doing whatever. So even in the animal species, with mammals, with human beings, the mother is the one who does that. And although I think it doesn't necessarily have to be like that, you know why do women always have to do the dirty work, but it's just always been like that. And I'm not saying that one must conform to society's beliefs just because it has been like that for centuries, but it just feels like something so much more feminine ( ) the girl as the caring person.

Interviewer: Turning 21?

Participant: How important is it to becoming a mother?

Interviewer: No, to becoming a woman.

Participant: I don't think it's that important, some people become pregnant way before then. Because, to me, becoming a woman is associated with getting periods and maybe becoming pregnant and since the course of that is not the same for every person, the age 21 doesn't necessarily have to be that critical, for

some become a mother way before that, some later, so I give that a five.

Interviewer: So, from your background, is turning 21 supposed to be quite an important aspect of becoming an adult?

Participant: I have to tell you this, in the coloured society there's always this big thing about becoming 21 and they have this big thing about halls so the whole society ( ). It's always this major thing. I'm just putting this in because I've noticed white people do it differently. But we all have to have this hall event, it must be in a hall, in 'n hall {laughter} and dress all formally and so on, but I never had one, so (.30) maybe that's not that important.

Interviewer: How would you say white people do it differently?

Participant: You know what, I've always wondered about it to myself. I was sitting and thinking to myself, because I have a couple of white friends also, and like I was wondering why it's such a vicious little circle. You know in most coloured communities these days if someone becomes 21, especially a girl, there's this whole like manoeuvre, you know. They hire a hall and there are people that come and there's like this whole speech type of thing and they cater the whole business. It's not like that for everybody but I think compared to white people it's mainly done in the coloured society, I don't know as far as black people are concerned. And I don't know why that is, what's the big thing with 21? But I know, for everybody it is just that different societies celebrate it differently, I don't know why ( ).

Interviewer: So for you personally it didn't feel (like it was that important)?

Participant: No. You know what, I didn't even have a 21st birthday. The day I turned 21 my mom had to go to Namibia because a family member was sick and I was at home alone with my grandmother alone, and she had forgot about my birthday, it

was actually a horrible day and I don't really want to talk about it.

Interviewer: Okay. Living away from home?

Participant: Very important because you become independent. ( ) I myself was an exchange student, I got a bursary from the school and I went to Germany and I stayed there for a year and that made all the difference. You can imagine, in any case I just had one parent, so the only parent I had is like half way around the world. I had to face so many difficult decisions, ( ) international stuff, I had to go through that, also I had ( ) my host family, they didn't understand English. So they told me when I got there that I had a month at most to understand German. But that was actually like an 'aansporing' [motivator] to me because I needed to start speaking these people's language in order to get through this year. Ja, so what I'm saying to you is I think it is important for a person to become independent, and that doesn't necessarily have to be restricted to being a female, I think any person has to go through that period of getting away for a while and I think in that regard, this whole residence set up. If I had daughters I would also want to expose them to such a set up, because you get in touch with other people and you learn how to share yourself, so it is something that I think is (very good), but I stayed in res too long.

Interviewer: Driving?

Participant: I think it's also very important, because why must all the guys always have cars? That is nonsense man. Ja, I myself had a bit of a problem with it, but I think it's very important. I'd give that a nine. The reason why I myself (.5) I do have my license but I don't drive because I caused an accident that was terrible and (.20) my grandfather is blind because of the accident so I'm not particularly fond of driving.

Interviewer: Umm (.30) losing your virginity?

Participant: What the original question, again?

Interviewer: How important a role it plays in becoming a woman.

Participant: Well, once again I think it links to the very first question about menstruation, followed by having kids. So I think that also signifies you're becoming a woman because where I grew up, and where I came from and how I grew up, you know when women actually do that, lose their virginity, so I think it's very important.

Interviewer: What score would you give it?

Participant: Ja no, you need to give that a ten out of ten because that is also part of my definition of becoming a woman.

Interviewer: Becoming a mother?

Participant: In becoming a woman? That falls into the same category, so also a ten.

Interviewer: Also a ten. So it's also very important?

Participant: It's also very important because, like I explained, this little step by step hierarchy: menstruation, having intercourse to be able to become a mother, so that is what it actually means to be a woman.

Interviewer: Being involved in a romantic relationship?

Participant: No, not necessarily. (.20) No wait. That must be important because how can you become a woman, how can you be pregnant without a man? So by all means that has to be important also, yes, like a nine.

Interviewer: And getting married?

Participant: Now that I would say is not necessarily important. I mean I myself was born and my mother wasn't married, so. Nowadays kids and their parents also, so one doesn't necessarily need that to feel like a woman. You don't necessarily need that to be married to feel like a fully-fledged woman, so I'd give that a five.

Interviewer: Also on a scale from one to ten, to what extent do you think womanhood is about being autonomous and independent?

Participant: To what extent? Umm (.50) Okay, so I also need to rate it? Okay, firstly I would say an eight, and also because I believe that nowadays women are capable of doing so many more things than they used to. I grew up being raised by a single woman, and for that I reason I believe that women can do things without men, you know. Here I stand today without the financial or emotional support of that fatherly figure. So I think its very important, yes.

Interviewer: Okay, and if you were to say, again on a scale from one to ten, to what extent womanhood is about being involved in relationships?

Participant: Although I know that it's necessary for a man to be in the picture if you want to fall pregnant and become a woman, but also I don't think a woman needs to rely on a man. A single woman can be fine and not be in a relationship with a man. You know, somehow (.20) we did this story once last year with Dr Kruger about this woman whose society was very patriarchal. She was almost seen, people were very suspicious of you if you don't have a guy friend, they just sommer assume that you're sleeping around with everybody, but the moment she has a steady boyfriend then people look at her differently, and in so many aspects, and to some extent I think our society is always suspicious of somebody, especially

if it's a woman, if that person is single. You always think 'I wonder what she's doing', you know. But the moment that you see this person with a steady person, your whole perception of the person changes. And that is so wrong. And so, I must say, that story that we did with Dr. Kruger is very important to me because it opened my eyes to see, that is not just restricted to a story, that does happen. But I don't think (.5), it doesn't have to be like that, a man doesn't have to be in the picture.

Interviewer: And if you talk about relationships in general, not necessarily intimate relationships, how important that is to womanhood?

Participant: Okay, maybe it was better if I put it like that earlier, an intimate relationship is important to becoming a woman, obviously, but in relationship with a man, no. And that is the story that I told you just now is my distinction that I make between the two. A woman can be fine and not be a slut and be okay. You know the funny thing to me is why people aren't suspicious of men who are single, or even if they are, they're not in the same way as they are with women. So that's why I'm saying women don't necessarily have to be involved with men to be labelled as women.

Interviewer: How important do you think it is to be involved in other relationships, for example family, siblings?

Participant: That I think is very important, but not just to be a woman, but since the question is about womanhood, it's very important for you to build several relationships with many people and to get that support from many sources, be that family or friends, I think that's very important.

Interviewer: What score would you give that?

Participant: An eight, also.

Interviewer: So, for the last question, if you had to compare being autonomous and independent versus being in relationships do you think they're equally important or do you think one is more important than the other? Relationships now being general relationships.

Participant: (.30) That is a very important question. Which of the two would be more important? It's like almost asking ( ) are you closing yourself off or sharing yourself with the world. You know what, I think both are evenly important. I don't like this whole image of, what's the term they use, learned helplessness, that's the general perception out there that women, that women themselves also have – 'we can't do this – why? – because we're a woman'. So I think you need to need to have that relationship with other people in order to grow personally and emotionally and spiritually, but yet at the same time you need to be able to distance yourself from other people as well and you need to do things yourself so that you don't depend on other people. So I think I would answer it by saying equally, because you need to have a bit of both to be a balanced person.

Interviewer: Well, that's all I have from my side. Is there anything you'd like to ask or add?

Participant: Yes, please if there's anybody out there who can do something about stretch marks {laughter} if you know somebody who's like a plastic surgeon or something.

Interviewer: {Laughter} Okay, anything else, anything that you think is important that you think we haven't covered?

Participant: I think we've covered a lot about (.20) but I must say what I said to you about my perceptions and stuff are predominantly influenced by how I grew up and the situations I grew up in. Those are my views that are influenced by my society, but I am not saying that that is the case for everybody out there. I can

see from a day to day basis. The nice thing about the set up that I live in is that I live with both white and black girls, so I can see how things inside cultures differ ( ).

Interviewer: That's interesting how would you say it does differ between the different groups?

Participant: Well, I've got a Gabonese girl, a black girl, also two white girls and two coloured girls beside myself. I just think in general, look we haven't really had this great big discussion about our different views, but I think in many regards our opinions and the way we do things differ, or the way we think about things, in many different ways. It's like I talked to one of the girls the other day, but that doesn't have to do with race, but they're both Honours students and the one is driving a Polo Playa and the other one's dad just bought her a brand new car.

Interviewer: Are they white?

Participant: Ja and I'm like to me in general when I came to Stellenbosch, so many of my first year friends had their own cars. Now where I come from girlfriend you can only dream about things like that. Whereas I got the impression that for them it's like second nature, you know. And what was so ironic about these two girlfriends of mine who are staying in [name of residence], they have brand new cars and they haven't even worked. Now the Polo Playa specifically, an uncle of mine is turning 30 this year and he's only getting his first car and he got it after having worked all these years. And so I was saying to them, it's such a different ballgame. And what we also differed about when we talked about it, both of them have fathers, but I don't, we were talking about the role of fatherhood and so one, we were talking about if there must be taken decisions in the family, then basically what they said, what it came down to, is that the woman or the mother must actually accept whatever decisions the father makes and I could not agree with that. I said at this time and age how can you be thinking like that. And we had

this big discussion about it, you know. But I think that basically had to do with the fact that both of them had moms and dads, (.20) so my situation was totally different and that is why we differ the whole time. But besides that I couldn't, I said to them, and I know it also has to do with your religion, but I don't understand why one's opinion ( ), I understand in so many regards there has to be a leader, but why does it necessarily have to be the man? So, we differed on that totally, very much.

Interviewer: Okay. Is there anything else?

Participant: Nothing that I can think of now.

Interviewer: Thanks so much, I really appreciate it.